



PHD

Seeking common ground: Assessing the practical implementation of the EU's normative power in EU-China dialogues

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UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences

**Seeking common ground: Assessing the practical
implementation of the EU's normative power in EU-China
dialogues**

Max Roger Taylor

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Bath**

Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies

December 2018

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A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'M' followed by a horizontal line.

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Abstract

Normative power Europe (NPE) reflects one of the most influential, yet controversial contributions to European Studies. Existing literature tends to adopt an abstract focus on whether the EU *is* or *is not* a normative power, based on macro-level analyses that focus on the outcomes of the EU's policies with third countries. This thesis instead seeks to ascertain the extent to which the EU's values are practically featuring in its external relations, focusing on the micro-level implementation of its normative power. This reflects an arena where the actual role of values in the EU's external action can be ascertained and meaningful change can take place.

To address this gap, this thesis concentrates on how individual EU officials are promoting or *mainstreaming* the EU's values in the diverse bilateral dialogues making up the EU-China Strategic Partnership. EU-China relations represent arguably the hardest test-case for the EU's normative power, as they display the greatest tension between the EU's economic interests and its values in its international relationships. While scholars commonly conclude that the EU's material interests are being prioritised at the expense of its values, discourse analysis of transcripts from 49 interviews, principally with officials from the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), reveals that the weakness of the EU's normative power is far more complex in practice.

It is impacted by contrasting perceptions of inter-institutional responsibilities, fears of antagonising the Chinese side, didactic approaches to value mainstreaming by EU officials and a lack of understanding of China amongst them. Nevertheless, this thesis also reveals that the EU's values do underpin EU-China dialogues in practice. Dialogues are framed by these values and officials sporadically raise them in exchanges as a result. This highlights the existence of the EU's normative power with China. However, these partial mainstreaming activities are limited in scope and unable to fully realise the ideal-type of NPE.

List of Abbreviations

AIIB - Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

BRI - Belt and Road Initiative

CASS - Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

CCT – *China Country Team*. EU internal coordination meetings in Brussels.

CDM - Clean Development Mechanism

CIA - EU-China Comprehensive Investment Agreement

CPE - Civilian power Europe

DG CLIMA - Directorate-General Climate Action

DG CONNECT - Directorate-General Communications Networks, Content and Technology

DG DEVCO - Directorate-General Development Cooperation

DG EAC - Directorate-General Education and Culture

DG ECFIN - Directorate-General Economic and Financial Affairs

DG ENER - Directorate-General Energy

DG ENV - Directorate-General Environment

DG GROW - Directorate-General Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs

DG HOME - Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs

DG JUST - Directorate-General Justice and Consumers

DG MOVE - Directorate-General Mobility and Transport

DG RELEX - Directorate-General External Relations

DG RTD - Directorate-General Research and Innovation

DG TRADE - Directorate-General Trade

EIDHR - European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights

ENP - European Neighbourhood Programme

EUCCC - European Chamber of Commerce in China

EUSR - EU Special Representative

FDI - Foreign Direct Investment

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

HPPD - High-Level People-to-People Dialogue

HR/VP - High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission

ICCPR - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

IR - International Relations

LAD - EU-China Legal-Affairs Dialogue

MoFA - Ministry of Foreign of the People's Republic of China

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

NPE - Normative power Europe

ODA - Official Development Assistance

PPD - People-to-People Dialogue

PRC - People's Republic of China

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

UN - United Nations

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNCHR - United Commission on Human Rights

UNHRC - United Nations Human Rights Council

UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

US - United States

USD - United States Dollar

WTO - World Trade Organisation

Chapter 1 - Introduction

For decades scholars have debated the nature of the EU as an international actor due to its non-traditional qualities (Damro, 2012:682; Duchene, 1972:38). In contrast to historical conceptualisations which privileged the EU's economic or military attributes, Ian Manners (2002i:235) maintained that the EU's international identity was altogether more progressive and unique. For Manners (*ibid.*), the EU reflected a *normative power*, primarily defined by its values, which represented its most potent asset in its external relations.

The concept of *normative power Europe* (NPE) has been very popular in academic and policymaking circles, with an ever-expanding body of literature and dedicated panels a regular fixture at European studies conferences. This attention has been catalysed by the EU appearing to formally present itself as a normative power: in the Lisbon Treaty (2009), the EU for the first time described how its values reflected the basis of its external action (EU, 2010i:28).

Nevertheless, Manner's (2002i) concept also remains highly controversial. Scholars often reject it based on arguments that the EU's material interests are being prioritised in its international relations, following macro-level appraisals of policy outcomes (Forsberg, 2011:1193; Sjursen, 2005:236-237). However, this archetypal manner of framing debates on NPE according to whether the EU *is* or *is not* a normative power arguably neglects not only the complex relationship between values and interests, but the nuanced dynamics taking place *in practice*.

Instead, greater attention should be paid to the micro-level dynamics informing the *extent* to which the EU's values are featuring in its external action, in line with the Lisbon Treaty. This includes the role of individual EU officials, the mechanisms framing their activities and the impact of their counterparts from third countries. This *micro-level* reflects an arena where the actual role of values in the EU's external action can be ascertained and meaningful change can take place, beyond superficial declarations or *grandstanding*. Nevertheless, it is highly under-researched.

This thesis addresses this gap, by focusing on how EU values feature in EU officials' engagement with China. EU-China relations reflect one of the EU's forefront bilateral partnerships. China represents the EU's second biggest economic partner and the EU,

China's largest (EEAS, 2016i; Panebianco, 2009:143). Trade flows exceed €1 billion per day and make China a crucial contributor to European economic growth and investment (European Commission, 2014i; Farnell and Crookes, 2016:4).

Moreover, the EU and China represent major global political powers, bilaterally and multilaterally addressing major challenges like trade, terrorism and climate change (EEAS, 2017i). With an isolationist United States under Donald Trump, they play not only an integral, but increasingly agenda-setting roles in multilateral forums like the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations, particularly its Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (EU Council, 2018). Reflecting these attributes, the partnership is immense, with multilateral and bilateral cooperation at the EU-level as well as distinct relationships in these arenas with individual EU member states.

Nevertheless, this extensive cooperation is largely one of necessity and mutual economic interest. It is highly transactional. While notable tensions impact EU-China trade relations, particularly surrounding China's anti-competitive policies, the political relationship is beset by a fundamental disagreement over values (Farnell and Crookes, 2016:4; Maher, 2016:962-963). This creates a significant tension between EU values and economic interests which is arguably unmatched in the EU's relations with other international actors. Additionally, this bilateral normative conflict arguably has far-reaching, global implications. China's increasing power, reflected in the scale of its Belt and Road Initiative (Huang, 2016:318-320), has the potential to de-facto normalise its own values, at the expense of the EU's. Consequently, EU-China relations can be seen to reflect the hardest test-case for the EU's normative power.

The sheer scale of EU-China relations necessitates this thesis focusing on the area which is of greatest pertinence to assessing the practical implementation of the EU's normative power. Arguably, the over 50 diplomatic dialogues making up the bilateral *EU-China strategic partnership*, reflect the most appropriate level of analysis (EEAS, 2017ii). These closed-door exchanges represent the *frontlines* of EU-level diplomacy with China. They consist of regular (typically annual) meetings between officials from each side to deepen cooperation and resolve challenges in each of the diverse sectors of bilateral cooperation (e.g. trade, energy, communications technologies) (*ibid.*).

A concentration on these dialogues is justified on the following basis. Firstly, NPE considers the EU as an international actor distinct from its member states and these

dialogues reflect the principal forums of the EU-level bilateral relationship. Secondly, these dialogues, operationalised by the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), also represent the *will* of all EU actors involved in EU-China relations. Their mandates are pre-agreed by other EU institutions and the member states.

Synchronising with NPE literature, EU-China scholars typically conclude that the EU's material interests are taking precedence over its values with China based on macro-level appraisals of policy outcomes that neglect the micro-level dynamics (See: Balducci, 2008:27; Fox and Godement, 2009:2; Mattlin, 2012:189). This again overlooks the complex relationship between values and interests, while insight into how individual EU officials coordinate and implement – or in official jargon *mainstream* - the EU's values in dialogues, is absent. There is thus a parallel gap in NPE and EU-China literature, impeding deeper understanding of the EU's normative power in practice. In order to address this gap, this thesis tackles the following research question:

How is the EU operationalising its normative power in EU-China relations in practice?

To formulate an answer, this thesis looks at the discursive practices in EU-China dialogues. It applies discourse analysis to EU and Chinese policy documents along with transcripts from 49 interviews, principally with EU officials from the European Commission and the EEAS operationalising EU-China dialogues. These were acquired using the elite interview method during 2017 in Brussels and Beijing. As minutes of EU-China dialogues are seldom publicly available, a vast amount of novel data was gained through these methods. The practical implementation of the EU's normative power was assessed both broadly and specifically in the context of human rights and the environmental dimension of sustainable development, arguably the most and least controversial values in EU-China relations. Through this process, the shared social backgrounds or *discourses* informing EU value mainstreaming with China were revealed.

Summary of findings

This thesis found that the EU's normative power remains weak in EU-China dialogues. The systematic value mainstreaming in all dialogues, prescribed by the EU's official discourse found in documents and the ideal-type of NPE, is not taking place in practice either more

broadly or specifically in the cases of human rights and sustainable development. This superficially appears to support the conclusions found in NPE and EU-China literature that the EU is prioritising its material interests with China, at the expense of its values. However, using discourse analysis, this thesis captured more nuanced factors underpinning these dynamics at the *micro-level* of EU-China dialogues, neglected by existing scholarship.

First and foremost, five key discourses were identified to be shared by EU officials, which were invoked to justify an avoidance of systematic value mainstreaming. These discourses fell into two categories and were identifiable in the accounts Commission and EEAS officials based in Brussels and Beijing. Firstly, what this thesis refers to as *organisational discourses* highlighted that institutional dynamics and understanding of roles and responsibilities were invoked as rationales for individual behaviour related to value mainstreaming. In this fashion, discourse 1 characterised value mainstreaming as implicit to EU-China dialogues and therefore requiring no further action to realise, while discourse 2 cast such activities as not applicable to individual officials' policy sectors and instead representing the exclusive responsibility of designated individuals and dialogues tasked with values.

The remaining three discourses surrounded *China's role* as a principal impediment to EU value mainstreaming. Discourse 3 surrounded a concern amongst EU officials that raising the most controversial values in dialogues – i.e. human rights/rule of law, but not sustainable development – would engender obstructive responses by China and undermine exchanges. Discourse 4 captured how EU officials considered value mainstreaming to be a pointless exercise (as well as risky), due to a perception that their Chinese counterparts were unable to impact Chinese policy connected to controversial EU values.

Lastly discourse 5 related to a perception amongst EU officials that *China is not listening to the EU and it should be*. The discourse informed a lack of reflexivity amongst EU officials and didactic approaches to value mainstreaming in the rare instances when it was taking place (particularly through the human rights dialogue). It was also revealed to have a deterrence effect on value mainstreaming in all other dialogues, due to a shared view amongst officials that such activities could only be conflictual and were likely to be unsuccessful.

Beyond these discourses, it emerged that a significant lack of Chinese cultural and linguistic knowledge among EU officials may be contributing to an avoidance of systematic value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues. Significantly, this thesis also identified and assessed *existing value mainstreaming practices* by EU officials. These activities highlighted that EU-China dialogues are underpinned by EU values and thus the existence of the EU's normative power with China. This reflects a key nuance neglected by scholars and integral to this thesis's original contribution.

In this context, it emerged that values were sporadically entering dialogues, despite the absence of systematic mainstreaming efforts by officials, as they were *pre-built* into each policy sector. This sporadic inclusion of values appeared to often take place without the awareness of officials, due to a lack of purposeful actions to realise them. This phenomenon was captured by the concept of *partial mainstreaming*. The thesis also revealed that the EEAS was conducting ad-hoc efforts to promote value mainstreaming in Commission-led dialogues. However, in both cases, the analysis suggested that these existing mainstreaming activities were limited in scope versus the systematic actions prescribed by the EU's official discourse and NPE. They were thus unable to fully realise the ideal-type of NPE with China and compensate for a lack of systematic value mainstreaming practices by officials in EU-China dialogues.

Thesis structure

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 first establishes the theoretical foundation of this thesis, outlining the concept of NPE and unpacking the elements which theorise the practical implementation of the EU's normative power. Within this context, the chapter establishes the project's principal focus on the EU values of human rights and sustainable development, specifically the latter's environmental dimension. This is justified on the basis that they reflect the most and least controversial values in the relationship.

In the case of human rights, the chapter also illuminates how this thesis will extend analysis to rule of law. The EU considers rule of law an enabler of human rights, making it an important component of the value. Additionally, Chapter 2 describes this project's original contribution. It displays how existing literature often approaches NPE in a fashion which lacks critical reflexivity, from a Eurocentric standpoint, as well as typically adopting

macro-level appraisals of the EU's external action. These approaches fail to capture the extent to which the EU's values are being prioritised in EU-China dialogues at the micro-level, including the role/impact of EU officials and their Chinese counterparts.

Building on this, Chapter 3, provides an overview of EU-China relations and the role of EU values therein. In this context, the imbalance between a highly developed economic relationship and a comparably nascent political relationship is highlighted to be largely derivative of a fundamental disagreement over values, especially human rights. Opposing interpretations of the value appear to impede the EU's efforts to promote it in EU-China dialogues. Conversely, sustainable development's comparably uncontroversial status is reflected in it underpinning successful environment and climate change cooperation.

Reinforcing this project's original contribution, Chapter 3 then describes how, while existing literature tends to be highly critical of the EU's value promotion with China, it focuses narrowly on human rights and the human rights dialogue (neglecting other values/dialogues). Moreover, it is highlighted that this literature overwhelmingly mirrors NPE scholarship in failing to capture the micro-level dynamics impacting the practical implementation - or *mainstreaming* - of the EU's normative power in EU-China dialogues. Within this context, the chapter also notably emphasises the importance of incorporating analysis of the EU-China Legal Affairs dialogue, which has been designed to indirectly promote human rights (and rule of law) via judicial cooperation. This under-researched dialogue not only embodies the EU's conceptual linkage between human rights and rule of law but presents a fascinating interinstitutional connection between EU human rights promotion and bilateral judicial cooperation.

Chapter 4 describes this thesis's research design, outlining a rigorous set of interrelated qualitative methods to answer the research question. These include the case study method as a means of justifying China as a single crucial case for assessing the practical implementation of the EU's normative power; the elite interview method as the principal tool for data collection that facilitates interviews with EU officials and discourse analysis as a means of maximising the richness of these accounts.

Chapter 5 provides an essential explanation of the practical machinations of EU-China dialogues and how value mainstreaming features in the interinstitutional relationship between the European Commission and the EEAS. It also addresses the potential impact

of China's opaque institutional systems on dialogues and EU value mainstreaming specifically.

Chapter 6 then begins to present this thesis's findings. The chapter importantly first establishes the EU's official discourse on value mainstreaming found in policy documents. This notably aligns with the ideal-type standards of NPE and existing definitions in academia/policymaking, providing a crucial reference point for assessing the practical implementation of the EU's normative power.

The analysis then reveals the main finding of this thesis: that *systematic value mainstreaming* in all EU-China dialogues, prescribed by the official discourse and NPE, is rarely taking place in practice. It then describes the five discourses justifying this, falling into two categories. These discourses are argued to fulfil Chinese, as opposed to EU interests in ensuring EU values are not being tabled in EU-China dialogues.

The remainder of Chapter 6 focuses on the first category, the *organisational discourses*. Discourse 1 encompasses officials justifying an eschewing of value mainstreaming on the basis that it is implicit to their dialogues and discourse 2 reflects a perception that such activities are inapplicable to officials' dialogues and the responsibility of other designated individuals and dialogues. The chapter also highlights how value mainstreaming is not being coordinated via the EU's internal interinstitutional meeting mechanisms in Brussels and Beijing, an absence which seemingly connects to the discourses challenging value mainstreaming.

Chapter 7 addresses the second category of discourses identified amongst EU officials, those surrounding *China's role* as the principal impediment to EU value mainstreaming. The chapter first focuses on discourse 3, which legitimises the avoidance of value mainstreaming on the basis that raising the most controversial values in dialogues (like human rights) will antagonise China and compromise exchanges. This discourse even extends to the human rights dialogue, where, instead of deterring mainstreaming, China's behaviour is considered to be the principal barrier to the EU's efforts to promote human rights.

The chapter then approaches discourse 4, which captures how EU officials eschew mainstreaming due to a perception that their Chinese counterparts will be unable to impact Chinese policy linking to controversial EU values. It emerges that the discourse appears to be partly based on the opacity of China's decision-making systems and claims

by the Chinese side that they cannot address these areas. In this sense, discourses 3 and 4 similarly deter value mainstreaming and can be linked to genuinely obstructive behaviour by the Chinese side. The chapter also argues that, as such conduct by the Chinese side is informed by an official party-state discourse, EU officials avoiding value mainstreaming out of concern over how their counterparts will respond, could be seen to reflect a de-facto compliance with the party line and an indirect endorsement of the official Chinese interpretation of human rights.

Lastly, Chapter 7 identifies and describes discourse 5, which relates to a view amongst officials that *China is not listening to the EU and it should be*. The discourse is revealed to be particularly nuanced and rooted in the EU's actions. It appears to inform didactic mainstreaming strategies in the isolated dialogues where such activities are taking place and a deterrence towards value mainstreaming in all other dialogues (e.g. trade, environmental and judicial cooperation dialogues).

The remaining two chapters of this thesis capture its additional findings. Chapter 8 highlights how a lack of understanding of China amongst EU officials reflects another factor contributing to weak value mainstreaming and the discourses informing it, particularly those surrounding *China's role*. This element, identifiable in interviewees' accounts, is due to limited cultural and linguistic capacity on the EU side which compares poorly with other Western diplomatic actors of comparable calibre. However, the chapter also highlights significant caveats to improvements in this area, citing the role of the Chinese side and the personalities on each side, both of which contribute to mutual understanding and are out with the EU's control.

Chapter 9 represents the last findings chapter of this thesis, importantly identifying and assessing the value mainstreaming practices which are taking place in EU-China dialogues, irrespective of the discourses and lack of understanding described in Chapter 6-8. The identification of these practices significantly highlights that values do underpin EU-China dialogues in practice and the existence of the EU's normative power with China.

Firstly, the chapter introduces the concept of *partial mainstreaming*, which captures how EU values are sporadically entering dialogues, often without the awareness of officials, due to EU values being *pre-built* into policy sectors. These activities are argued to be a poor substitute for the absence of systematic value mainstreaming and unable to fully

realise the ideal-type of NPE, due to their limited scope. They fail to ensure that the value dimensions of dialogues are comprehensively identified and raised in every exchange.

Thereafter the chapter describes the ad-hoc efforts by the EEAS to coordinate value mainstreaming across Commission-led dialogues. Again, however, these activities are argued to be a weak substitute for systematic value mainstreaming and unable to fully realise the ideal-type of NPE, considering their irregular role in interinstitutional contacts and low impact. The chapter closes with discussion of how logistical limitations and interinstitutional tensions may be contributing to a perpetuation of these sub-par mainstreaming practices. A final concluding chapter summarises this thesis's key findings and reflects upon their implications for future research and the EU-China partnership.

Chapter 2 - Theorising the practical implementation of the EU's normative power in EU-China dialogues

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical concept of normative power Europe (NPE), which underpins this thesis. Firstly, the chapter introduces and unpacks NPE, justifying the concept's appropriateness for theorising the research question (Sections 2.2-2.3). NPE's specification of the EU's values also makes it possible to focus on human rights and the environmental dimension of sustainable development, arguably the values of greatest pertinence to EU-China relations (See Section 2.3.2). Most significantly however, NPE outlines the mechanisms used by the EU to operationalise its normative power in practice, making it possible to theoretically capture the mainstreaming of EU values through EU-China dialogues (Section 2.3.3).

Subsequently, the chapter establishes how this thesis interacts with existing literature and makes an original contribution, analysing key criticisms and debates of NPE relevant to the research question (Section 2.4). The literature review highlights that existing works tend to lack reflexivity about how norms are being diffused and their flow between the EU and third countries. Most pertinently, existing works have tended to neglect the nuances involved in the practical implementation of the EU's normative power. Instead, scholars have tended to parsimoniously judge the EU's status as a normative power, based upon the extent to which EU values are being prioritised in the EU's external action, according to a macro-level analysis of EU foreign policy and its impact.

This thesis departs from these limited approaches. It aims to capture the complexities of the practical implementation of the EU's normative power, through a focus on the role of individual EU officials responsible for value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues.

Through establishing the elements of NPE necessary to theorise the research question and a critical analysis of existing literature, a crucial foundation is established for this thesis. This makes it possible to effectively design and operationalise empirical data collection, inform its analysis and ensure that the findings reflect an original research contribution.

2.2 Situating NPE in historical debates: a response and reappraisal of past literature

It is important first to examine how Manners' (2002i:235) conceptualisation of the EU as a *normative power* interacts with and builds upon historical debates surrounding Europe's role and identity in world politics. In this context, NPE can be seen to reflect both a *response to* and *reappraisal of* past literature on the subject. Manners (2002i:235) argued that the changes embodied by the post-Cold War international system necessitated a "rethink" of historical conceptualisations theorising the *ideal-type* international role that Europe should aspire to, particularly those by Francois Duchene (1972) and Hedley Bull (1982). Their opposing seminal works were premised upon the Cold War international environment and thus argued to be outdated in their perspectives and prescriptions (Diez and Manners, 2007:173; Whitman, 2011:1).

Duchene (1972:38-43) argued that Europe, reflecting systemic restraints to its militarisation and its "amilitary" (Diez, 2005:617) values, could become a non-military¹ *civilian power* (a.k.a. civilian power Europe or CPE) that shared its pacific practices to *civilise* world politics. Conversely, Bull (1982:149-151), from a rationalist IR theory perspective, maintained that such assertions were idealistic and based upon a momentary *détente* between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union (*See also*: Niemann and Bretheron, 2013:263 Orbie, 2006:124-126; Whitman, 2011:4). For Bull (1982:151-156), Europe, as a collection of states rather than a unitary actor, needed to instead accumulate traditional military power if it was not to remain ill-equipped and vulnerable in world politics, as the external environment gradually returned to anarchic normality (*See also*: Manners, 2002i:236-237).²

Manners' (2002i:235) NPE can be seen to acknowledge elements from both key rival conceptualisations in its *re-conceptualisation* of the EU's ideal-type contemporary international role as a *normative power*. As opposed to wholly eschewing Bull (1982) and Duchene's (1972) conceptualisations, Manners (2006i:168) views the EU's normative

¹ Duchene (1972:38, 45) particularly emphasised Europe's economic capacity, maintaining that it had to the potential to become an "imposing" economic force and "a massive market no one can ignore".

² A central premise of the traditional rationalist neorealist and neoliberal paradigms is that of systemic anarchy. In the absence of a world government, the neo-neo paradigms assert that the international system is anarchic, and that states' survival is thus dependent on vigilantly accruing power to balance against potentially malign state rivals (Elman and Jensen, 2013:18; Mearsheimer, 2001:18).

power as a *superseding addition* to the “pre-existing European ideal types of *civilian* vs *military* power” (Manners, 2006i:168; See also; Manners and Whitman, 2003:390).

In this regard, Manners (2002i:235-239) acknowledges the EU’s uniquely “*pacific*” (Manners and Whitman, 2003:398) contemporary military role with its humanitarian focus and civilian/military activities. He also recognises the EU’s civilian power role, reflected in its unparalleled development aid, wide-ranging trade relations and penchant for institutionalism (Manners, 2002i:235-239; 2008ii26; Manners and Whitman, 2003:388). However, it is crucial to highlight that Manners (2002i) does not consider this inter-relationship between the EU’s international roles to be entirely static, instead, being subject to an “ongoing process of evolution and interplay” as international events and the EU’s responses can “ultimately weaken or undermine the strength of one particular role” (Manners and Whitman, 2003:390). For example, whether the EU resorts to sanctions or engagement with countries like China or Iran that express different interpretations of EU values (*ibid.*).

Relating back to the research question, NPE therefore importantly recognises that the EU has strong material interests which co-exist with its normative objectives. This is an important tension impacting the practical implementation of the EU’s normative power. As detailed in Section 2.4, many scholars neglect NPE’s nuanced appraisal of the interplay between EU interests and values, unduly and parsimoniously dismissing Manners (2002i) conceptualisation on the grounds that the EU’s material (typically economic) interests seemingly prevail in any given case.

NPE also crucially departs from some key aspects of Duchene (1972) and Bull’s (1982) conceptualisations. Firstly, Manners importantly identifies and seeks to distance NPE from the neo-colonial dimensions of Duchene’s concept. As Manners (2006ii:184) articulates:

Civilizing is far too encumbered a term to be used in any self-reflexive discussion of European relations with the rest of the world.

For Manners, the terminology connects to negative “Eurocentric strategies of narrativizing history” (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, this integral departure from CPE appears to be frequently neglected by NPE literature (See Section 2.4).

Beyond this, Manners (2002i:238) also highlights that both Duchene (1972) and Bull's (1982) conceptualisations embody traditional (rationalist) IR assumptions about a Westphalian international system which NPE aims to distance itself. In this sense, NPE focuses on the increased significance of *norms* in post-Cold War international politics as opposed to "direct physical power" (Manners 2002:238). It also rejects the "fixed nature of the nation state" (*ibid.*) in its characterisation of the EU as a supranational actor, distinct from its member states (Manners, 2006ii:184; Whitman, 2011:4). Relatedly, NPE seeks to deviate from the primacy of material self-interest envisioned by Duchene (1972) and Bull's (1982) conceptualisations (Manners 2002i:238; Diez and Manners, 2007:179). The EU's normative power displays a prioritisation of values in the EU's external action to pursue a *common good* in line with universally agreed principles (*ibid.*).

2.3 Theorising the practical implementation of the EU's normative power in EU-China dialogues

Having situated NPE, the next step is to define and unpack NPE, displaying how it reflects the most appropriate framework for theorising the *practical* implementation of the EU's normative power in EU-China dialogues. This includes demonstrating how it captures this thesis's focus on human rights and the environmental dimension of sustainable development, along with the role of EU-China diplomatic dialogues as a channel for practically promoting EU values.

2.3.1 Defining normative power Europe

Manners (2002ii:32) broadly defines the EU's normative power as the capacity to "shape or change what passes for normal in international relations". Manners (2008i:46), attributes this substantial potency to a synchronisation between the EU's values and the "universally applicable" values of the "United Nations system" (*See also*: Diez and Manners, 2007:182). Through this alignment, Manners (2008i:46; 2011:233) claims that the EU's normative power crucially derives legitimacy as well as influence, while countering potential criticism that the EU's dissemination of its values amounts to

incipient “cultural imperialism which continues the mission civilisatrice of the European colonial states” (Forsberg, 2011:1187).

Additionally, Manners (2002i:253) maintains that the EU holds this unique normative power as a product of its *normative difference* from other international actors. He argues that the EU’s values, historically informed by a desire to avoid repeating the horrors of two world wars and the totalitarian governance that enabled them, are constitutionally bound into its hybrid intergovernmental/supranational polity, creating an actor with a “different [normative] basis” (*ibid.*) for its external action (*See also*: Diez, 2005:619; Manners and Whitman, 2003:398; Whitman, 2013:175).

Notably, Manners (2002i:239) maintains that the EU’s normative power also displays both *symbolic* and *substantive* dimensions. The former relates to the EU’s capacity to disseminate its values *passively*, with other international actors observing and being influenced by the EU’s actions or even its mere existence (*ibid.*). The EU represents an economic and social model that others aspire to and may be willing to emulate (*ibid.*). Conversely, the substantive dimension of the EU’s normative power captures the *active* promotion of EU values, such as that through development aid, or crucially for this thesis, diplomatic dialogues with third countries like China (Manners, 2011:230-232; Whitman, 2011:6).

According to Manners (2008i:46; 2011:230; 2013:310), the EU’s activities through these active and passive channels should be principally justified according to its values, as opposed to its material interests. Moreover, they should be employed coherently and consistently (*ibid.*). Manners (2008i:58-59) also emphasises the importance of the EU being reflexive about how it promotes its values and its impact on external partners, “encouraging local ownership” of initiatives and following a utilitarian philosophy of “do least harm”. This consolidates NPE’s rejection of the neo-colonial trappings of Duchene’s (1972) conceptualisation. As Whitman (2011:8) notes:

Universally accepted values cannot be pushed forward on third parties but must be acceptable to Europeans and non-Europeans alike in terms of principles, actions and impact.

Reflecting these aspects, assessing the practical implementation of the EU’s normative power through EU-China dialogues, requires judging the extent to which the EU’s values

are not only featuring in exchanges in a coherent and consistent fashion, but acting as a superseding logic for exchanges and their themes. Similarly, the analysis needs to scrutinise the extent to which the EU is promoting its values in a reflexive and egalitarian fashion.

Beyond this, it is significant to highlight that Manners' (2011:227) conceptualisation has a *normative theory* component, insofar as he argues that the EU "*should* act to extend its norms into the international system [emphasis added]"; i.e. that the spread of the EU's values is intrinsically *a good thing* (See also: Diez, 2013:205). This superficially appears to suggest that the EU is already meeting its ideal-type as a normative power, promoting scholarship which fails to problematise the EU's normative power in practice. However, Diez (2013:205) argues that on closer reading, NPE can be seen to recognise that the EU's "foreign policy is not consistent" and that the EU instead, *should aspire* to be a normative power.

The conceptualisation therefore seeks to illuminate the EU's values and aspirations to aid it in meeting the *ideal-type* envisioned by Manners (Diez, 2013:205). This importantly reaffirms NPE's recognition of a nuanced relationship between the EU's material interests and its values with third countries. It highlights that empirical analysis should be framed in terms of assessing the *extent* to which the EU is meeting this ideal-type in EU-China dialogues in practice, as opposed to making assertions about whether the EU *is* or *is not* a normative power. Ultimately, the above analysis displays how NPE reflects an appropriate conceptual framework for critically assessing the practical implementation of the EU's normative power in EU-China dialogues. It specifically theorises the role of values in the EU's external action.

2.3.2 Establishing the fabric of the EU's normative power: Defining the EU's values and a focus on human rights and sustainable development

Reinforcing the concept's appropriateness for the research question, NPE also crucially articulates the EU's values. This makes it possible to isolate and assess the practical promotion of individual values in EU-China dialogues. Manners (2002i:242; 2008ii:55) asserts that the EU has nine constitutive norms (or values) which can be explicitly identified in the EU's treaties and align with those at the international level. They are

categorised into five *core* values (peace, liberty, democracy, human rights and rule of law) and four *minor* values (social progress, anti-discrimination, sustainable development and good governance) which are argued to be comparably more contested and recent in their origin (Manners, 2002i:242).

It is important to acknowledge that the EU also adheres to and promotes other norms in its external relations, particularly those encompassed by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which contribute to its trade policy. However, NPE and by extension this thesis, considers the EU's normative power to be principally reflected in the values described above. These are explicitly articulated as the basis of the EU's external action in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty (See Chapter 6.2).

In the context of EU-China dialogues, while this thesis will address the practical promotion or *mainstreaming* of EU values *holistically*, it will particularly focus on the promotion of *human rights* and *sustainable development*, on the basis that they reflect arguably the most and least controversial values in the bilateral relationship (See Chapter 3). This section will summarise these values.

Human rights

Firstly, human rights are considered integral to the EU's normative identity. The EU promotes a comprehensive definition of the value, which perceives an "interdependence" (Manners, 2008ii:51) between *individual civil and political rights* and *collective socio-economic rights* (See Table 2.1 below for key examples of each). Significantly, for the EU, human rights are perceived to be all-encompassing, being considered universal and indivisible from its other values, particularly rule of law and liberal democracy. These values are argued by Burnay et al. (2016:97) to foster an interdependent triangle with human rights (See also: Manners, 2008ii:51). In effect, rule of law and liberal democracy facilitate and protect human rights.

While, as described in Chapter 3, liberal democracy is effectively side-lined in EU-China relations, this thesis's focus on human rights will extend to the promotion (or mainstreaming) of *rule of law*, which features prominently. For the EU's external action, rule of law consists of promoting legal systems where there is a separation of power between the government and the judiciary, the supremacy of the law over all individuals

and institutions (including the government), the independence of the judiciary, and the “transparent, efficient, and fair” (European Commission, 2018i) preparation and enforcement of legislation (Burnay et al., 2016:96).

Importantly, as described in Chapter 3.6, the EU has institutionally made the linkage between human rights and rule of law in EU-China relations. A dialogue on judicial cooperation – the Legal Affairs Dialogue – displays overlapping personnel with the EU’s human rights infrastructure.³ Moreover, the dialogue appears to have been designed as an *indirect* channel for promoting human rights with China, under the auspices of technical cooperation on Chinese judicial reform (Burnay et al., 2016:101-103).⁴

As “human rights are at the very heart of EU’s relations with other countries” (EU, 2015) and the value reflects the most controversial normative conflict in EU-China relations, this thesis’s focus on it is arguably justified (*See also*: Panebianco, 2006:130). Ultimately, human rights in EU-China relations represents a fertile ground for testing the EU’s commitment to its values in practice. If the EU is found to be prioritising this particularly controversial value in EU-China dialogues, it would suggest that the EU’s normative power is strong with China.

³ Interviews with an official from DG JUST on 09.02.2017 at 10.30am and diplomats from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am and 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

⁴ (*ibid.*)

Table 2.1 Key collective socio-economic and individual civil and political rights (EHRC 2018i; 2018ii)

Collective socio-economic rights	Individual civil and political rights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to fair and just conditions of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom from slavery and forced labour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to social security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention and imprisonment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of movement into, within and out of a state
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to fair treatment by the judicial process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to privacy, home and family life
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of thought, religion and expression
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to peaceful assembly
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of association, including through trade unions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to (consensual, equalitarian) marriage and the rights of children
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to political participation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to equality and non-discrimination.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development principally surrounds the EU's persistent efforts to attain a balance between "uninhibited economic growth and biocentric ecological crisis" (Manners, 2008ii:54), in the face of its pervasive difficulties in reconciling "economic and environmental interests" (Manners, 2006iii:37). As European Commission outlines, paraphrasing the Brundtland Report's early (and oft-quoted) definition of the value (See: WCED, 1987:16), EU sustainable development focuses on "meeting the needs of present generations without jeopardizing the ability of futures generations to meet their own needs" (EU Commission, 2015i).

The value has dramatically increased in significance for the EU in recent years, even since Manners' later writings on NPE (See: Manners, 2008ii), evidenced by its formal articulation in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty; characterisation by the European Council (the same year) as a "fundamental objective of the European Union" (DG Environment, 2015i) in 2009; and the key role it occupies in the 2010 *EU 2020 Strategy* (See also: EU, 2010i:17; 2010ii:8-9).

However, it is crucial to highlight that the EU value of sustainable development has evolved with the UN's 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which superseded the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2018). The value, its scope and application has become multidimensional, now including social and economic dimensions, as well as the forefront environmental facet (EU Commission, 2016i; 2018ii). This nebulous use of sustainable development presents a challenge for assessing how it is being practically mainstreamed in EU-China dialogues, as the contemporary definition overlaps with the EU's pursuit of human rights and its economic interests.

This thesis will therefore focus on the dominant environmental dimension of sustainable development. This facet of the value has become prominent in the EU's external action, notably underpinning high-profile international environment and climate cooperation at the multilateral and bilateral levels, wherein the EU is a leading proponent (EU Commission, 2018iii). More pertinently, as described in Chapter 3, environment and climate change cooperation has emerged as a forefront area of EU-China political relations. This arguably makes the environmental dimension of sustainable development

the least controversial value in the bilateral relationship. In theory, this uncontroversial status in EU-China relations should mean that, unlike human rights, the value is most likely to be mainstreamed into EU-China dialogues. It is effectively the easiest test for the EU's normative power with China.

Reflecting the above clarifications, when sustainable development is mentioned in this thesis, it will be with reference to the environmental dimension, unless stated otherwise. However, it is worth highlighting that the multidimensional nature of sustainable development means that the value can mean different things in different contexts. This thesis will remain vigilant for this during data collection and analysis.

2.3.3 Defining the mechanisms used by the EU to practically implement its normative power through EU-China dialogues

Consolidating the appropriateness of NPE as a framework for this thesis, the concept can also importantly theorise how the EU's values are practically promoted through EU-China dialogues, the specific setting of interest for this project. Manners' (2002i) NPE describes mechanisms of *norm diffusion* (i.e. *channels*) used by the EU to project both the symbolic (passive) and substantive (active) dimensions of its normative power towards third countries (Manners, 2002i:244-245; 2013i:314-319).

Regarding the symbolic mechanisms, *informational diffusion* surrounds how values are shared through third countries observing the EU's strategic declarations/communications and replicating their prescriptions, while *Contagion* captures how the EU unintentionally shares its values through third countries merely observing the EU's behaviour and following its example (Manners, 2002i:244; 2013:316). With their focus on passive actions by the EU, these mechanisms do not capture how the EU mainstreams its values through EU-China dialogues, as mainstreaming implies active and purposeful action.⁵

Straddling the substantive and symbolic mechanisms, Manners (2002ii:36; 2013:318) also describes the *cultural filter*, which pertains to the inter-relationship between the EU's capacity to disseminate values with third countries and the capacity/receptiveness of their civil societies to internalise them. Again, this mechanism is not appropriate, focusing

⁵ *Mainstreaming* is defined in Chapter 6.2.3.

on the role of civil society as opposed to the official-official contacts reflected in EU-China dialogues.

Concerning the substantive mechanisms, *transference* captures how the EU physically shares its values through trade or development aid which are often based on conditionality agreements, or through funding non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in third countries (Manners, 2002:245; 2013:317). This aspect is once more unable to capture the EU's promotion of values through EU-China dialogues. Instead, it captures the role of values in EU-funded activities *informed* by dialogues, such as bilateral cooperation programmes and projects. These programmes and projects are funded through instruments beyond the dialogue framework, such as the Partnership Instrument and the EU's Official Development Assistance (ODA), the latter of which China is no longer eligible for (EU Commission, 2018iv).⁶

It is important to highlight that these funding activities are not predicated on value-based conditionality. China's economic significance to the EU provides it with little scope to apply such measures with China, which are dependent on the EU having asymmetrical power in relationships (Mattlin, 2012:185; Panebianco, 2009:133). Lastly, *Transference* also captures the EU's funding of civil society groups through funding such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which reflects another framework distinct from EU-China dialogues and thus again not applicable to this thesis (EU Commission, 2018v).⁷

However, the remaining two substantive mechanisms effectively support the research question. Firstly, *procedural diffusion* directly captures value mainstreaming through EU-China dialogues. The mechanism theorises how the EU actively disseminates its values through institutionalising its relationships with third countries and explicitly incorporating its values into associated bilateral dialogues and agreements (Manners, 2002i:244). It therefore alludes to purposeful and systematic actions to promote EU values through these frameworks. Examples include pre-accession association agreements, the European Neighbourhood Programme (ENP)⁸ and most pertinently, strategic partnerships with

⁶ From 2017, China was no longer eligible for EU ODA (Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels).

⁷ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

⁸ The ENP is an EU initiative seeking to offer countries that are not future members, neighbouring the EU, 'everything but institutions' in exchange for adoption of the EU's 'norms, rules and standards' (Barbe et al. 2009:378, 379).

major (or strategically significant) powers like China, along with the dialogues underpinning them (Forsberg, 2011:1185; Manners and Whitman, 2013:191).⁹

However, as Manners (2013:317) importantly notes, in several cases the EU's insistence on a normative facet has proved "extremely controversial" in its bilateral relationships. As described in Chapter 3, China reflects a key example, wherein there is little agreement on EU values (See: Mattlin, 2012:186; Panebianco, 2009:142, 143). Ostensibly, this thesis is seeking to assess the EU's normative power through procedural diffusion in practice, according to a) the standards of NPE and b) the EU's official discourse on value mainstreaming found in policy documents, which aligns with these standards (See Chapter 6.2).

In addition to procedural diffusion, NPE's mechanism of *overt diffusion* also underpins an important element of this thesis: the distinction between value mainstreaming in practice by Brussels-based EU officials and those based on the ground at the EU delegation to China in Beijing. The mechanism theorises how the physical presence of the EU in third countries¹⁰ can act as a highly localised and direct means of value promotion, which can be distinguished from less frequent/impersonal contacts between Brussels-based officials and their counterparts from third countries (Forsberg, 2011:1185; Manners, 2013:318).

This thesis's analytical disaggregation between Brussels-based and Beijing-based officials is arguably significant to EU-China relations where mutual understanding is less robust than in other relationships, reflecting a symptom of bilateral disagreement over values (See Chapter 3.5). EU officials based in China may have developed more effective strategies for value mainstreaming, based on greater Chinese cultural and linguistic knowledge, than their colleagues in Brussels. Table 2.2 summarises NPE's mechanisms of norm diffusion below.

Overall, Manners' (2002i) mechanism of procedural diffusion can be seen to theoretically capture the practical implementation of the EU's normative power by EU officials operationalising EU-China dialogues. Building on this, the mechanism of overt diffusion

⁹ To date, the EU has Strategic Partnerships with: Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea and the United States (ESP, 2016i).

¹⁰ This includes but irregular visits by senior EU officials and even EU 'peacekeeping/peacebuilding' missions on the ground (Manners, 2013:318; See also: Manners, 2002i:244; Manners and Whitman, 2013:192).

theorises this project's analytical distinction between the role EU officials based in Brussels and Beijing operationalising EU-China dialogues.

Table 2.2 Theorising the practical implementation of the EU's normative power in EU-China dialogues

Mechanism of norm diffusion in NPE	Theorises value mainstreaming in practice via EU-China dialogues	Description
Informational diffusion (symbolic)		Captures how the EU shares its values through passive declarations.
Contagion (symbolic)		Captures how the EU shares its values through its actions and very existence.
The cultural filter (both symbolic and substantive)		Captures the interplay between the EU and third countries' respective capacities to share and receive values at the (non-official) societal level.
Transference (substantive)		Theorises how the EU shares values through transferring resources to third countries, i.e. conditionality for development aid.
Procedural diffusion (substantive)	X	Theorises how the EU shares its values through institutionalised bilateral engagement. Principally captures how the EU implements (or mainstreams) its values through EU-China dialogues.
Overt diffusion (substantive)	X	Theorises how the EU shares its values through its physical presence. Importantly distinguishes between EU officials based in Brussels and those in third countries for assessing the practical implementation of the EU's normative power.

2.4 Key debates and criticisms of normative power Europe

Introduction

For this thesis to make an original research contribution and assess the practical implementation of the EU's normative power with China in an effective and balanced manner, it is essential to not only comprehensively understand NPE, but the central debates surrounding it. As Manners (2006i:180) states:

Anyone arguing that the EU does 'good' in the world should cause us to engage in socially contextual consideration and contestation of this argument.

To this end, the following section will address the criticisms of NPE which are of greatest relevance to this thesis, namely; 1) the lack of critical reflexivity amongst many proponents; 2) the failure to problematise *one-way* norm diffusion; 3) the neglect of EU member states in analysis; and 4) arguments that the EU's material interests take precedence in its external action.

The importance of critically approaching the EU's normative power

Firstly, NPE literature is often criticised for its lack of critical reflexivity, which is argued to have negative practical implications for value mainstreaming by EU officials. In this context, scholars maintain that there is an identifiable "Eurocentric" (Niemann and Bretherton, 2013:264) inclination amongst proponents, making them "unable to distinguish between their own sympathies for the European project and their critical role as academics" (Sjursen, 2006:170; *See also*: Forsberg, 2011:1187; Youngs, 2004:417).

While this bias arguably equates to poor scholarship, it also has potentially significant wider implications, as the ideal-type enshrined by NPE is "very similar" (Sjursen 2006:170) to the idealistic self-perceptions held by many EU officials, who view "Europe as a force for peace and well-being" (Diez, 2005:620) in world politics. Consequently, the idealised perspectives expressed by both NPE academics and EU practitioners can be seen to effectively overlap (Diez, 2005:614-615; Diez and Manners, 2007:174).

Following this, scholars express concern that uncritical NPE scholarship may be encouraging, rather than challenging the self-perceptions of EU officials, risking

promotion of the EU's normative power which lacks reflexivity (Aggestam, 2008:6; Scheipers and Sicurelli, 2007:436, 453; Sjursen, 2006:178; Whitman, 2011:8). Whitman (2011:8), emphasises the importance of academics viewing the EU's claims to be normative critically and not being blinded by its "honourable motives", which do not represent sufficient criteria for judging its "normative quality" as an actor (*See also*: Balducci, 2008:9; Niemann and Bretherton, 2013:264). In practice, Whitman (2011:8) elaborates, policies based on "good intentions" may be neglecting other actors "interests or values".

Responding to these arguments, Manners and Diez (2007:174) emphasise the importance of "reflection and reflexivity" among scholars, maintaining that such attributes are key to the EU aspiring to NPE's ideal-type as opposed to "pure self-interested hegemony". In this sense, adopting a critical approach to enquiry appears to be essential to not only conducting a balanced assessment of the practical implementation of the EU's normative power with China, but ensuring that the findings aid self-reflection amongst EU officials and make the greatest positive impact on existing practices.

The importance of adopting a critical approach to the EU's normative power is further reinforced by scholars suggesting that existing literature may be neglecting to identify and challenge behaviour by EU officials operationalising the EU's values, which could be interpreted as neo-colonial in nature, an aspect at odds with Manners' (2002i) vision for NPE scholarship. As Bicchi (2006:287) notes, the EU displays a "deeply engrained belief that Europe's history is a lesson for everybody", which, may be manifesting in behavioural tendencies which are not reflexive.

In this vein, Aggestam (2008:7) warns scholars about uncritically accepting the *universality* of the EU's values, noting that the EU's "impulse to draw on a distinct European experience to shape the world in its own image" stands at odds with its claims to universal (normative) legitimacy. Reflecting this, Bicchi (2006:289) urges scholars to carefully consider whether the EU is empowering external actors and giving them "a voice" in its foreign policy and the values which inform it, as opposed to asserting its positions while remaining inattentive to partners' perspectives.

To this end, this thesis will remain vigilant throughout data collection and analysis for evidence of approaches by EU officials to mainstreaming values in EU-China dialogues that lack reflexivity. Reflecting the above analysis, such conduct can be characterised by

instances where EU officials assert the superiority of the EU's values and the need for China to comply, while dismissing any alternative Chinese perspectives. This aspect is arguably highly salient to EU-China relations, where the EU is promoting interpretations of (mutually agreed) universal values which China contests, particularly in the case of human rights. Moreover, China importantly has historical experience of European colonialism, making it very sensitive to any perceived attempts by the EU to impose its ideas/practices (See Chapter 3.5).

Problematising norm diffusion as a one-way process

Building on this, scholars have also criticised NPE and broader international relations literature for neglecting the agency of non-Western states and perpetuating the “biased and incomplete” (Pu, 2012:347) notion that Western powers are diffusing norms in a one-way fashion, as opposed to a dynamic two-way process (See also, Acharya, 2004:241). Pu (2012:342) highlights that far from being passive receivers of the values underpinning the Western world order, emerging powers such as Brazil, Russia and most pertinently China, display not only distinct alternative interpretations of international norms, but the desire and capacity to diffuse them internationally and impact major global issues (See also: Kavalski, 2013:249).

China reflects a particularly strong example of these attributes. At the multilateral level it actively challenges (with other emerging powers) Western interventionism in favour of unconditional state sovereignty, while it has been the standard bearer for “common but differentiated responsibilities” (Pu, 2012:341) for developing countries in multilateral climate negotiations (See Chapter 3.4). More pertinently, China's development model including the values which underpin it, has emerged as a distinct and attractive alternative to Western models for developing countries keen to emulate China's economic growth (Lanteigne, 2015:42; Pu, 2012:342-343). China has fuelled the international spread of its model through the exhaustive building of bilateral relations and vast global investments, including those encompassed by the globe-spanning Belt and Road Initiative (Kavalski, 2013:252; Lanteigne, 2015:46; See Chapter 3.2). Reflecting this capacity to diffuse norms and the ambition to do so, Kavalski (2013:255) suggests that

China itself reflects a normative power which offers “a viable alternative to the models proffered by western actors”.¹¹

Considering this distinct normative identity amongst emerging powers like China, Pu (2012:344) argues that a one-way conceptualisation of norm diffusion is outdated and “blinds us from understanding the complex interactions between emerging powers and international norms”, which are two-way in nature. In this fashion, the flow of norms between Western and non-Western actors is dynamic, with the latter not wholly accepting nor rejecting the norms of Western interlocutors, instead subjecting them to both resistance and “*reframing*” (Pu, 2012:344), the latter encompassing active efforts to project an alternative interpretation (*ibid.*, p. 347; *See also*: Acharya, 2004:241-242). Consequently, in EU-China dialogues, China can be seen to reflect not only a *norm-taker*, but a *norm-shaper*, (Pu, 2012:357-359).¹² This *norm shaping* notably represents a global discourse, shared by China, which seeks to challenge the alleged superiority of “Western ideas and culture” (*ibid.*, p.357) and define what constitutes legitimate international norms.

A recognition of the *dynamic flow* of norms in EU-China dialogues represents an important nuance for this thesis, which is largely neglected by NPE literature. Departing from NPE’s assumption that norm diffusion between the EU and China reflects a somewhat binary *acceptance* or *rejection* of the EU’s values in their entirety, it offers the analytical capacity to identify evidence of areas where the EU and China have partially accepted or reframed each other’s values and how this is impacting EU value mainstreaming. This nuance is particularly pertinent for EU-China relations wherein each side offers such conflicting interpretations of universal values and wholesale adoption of values is unlikely (*See* Chapter 3.5). In effect, China’s agency may represent a *counterforce to* and *limitation of* the EU’s normative power, engendering a stalemate where each side’s values can only be partially shared or enmeshed. While this thesis is focused on the processes rather than the outcomes of the EU’s normative power (*see below*), it will

¹¹ Kavalski (2013:248) describes how this model departs from the EU’s application of abstract values to every international relationship, instead being driven by “practices of interaction”, including mutual respect and reciprocity, tailored to each relational context (*See also, ibid.* p.255).

¹² Pu (2012:359) describes how emerging powers *take* norms as a necessity in the early stages of their development, while in the later stages of their development, aligning only with those which they consider beneficial and/or legitimate. In turn, he argues that emerging powers are actively “shaping the further evolution of norms” (*ibid.*) in other areas deemed contrary to their interests and/or *illegitimate*.

remain vigilant for any evidence of these nuanced dynamics, that may have significant implications for EU value mainstreaming in practice.

The neglect of the role of member states in the EU's external action

Another key criticism of NPE is that scholars tend to theoretically neglect the role of EU member states, which are argued to “exert considerable influence in the EU foreign policy system” (Diez, 2013:198; *See also*: Aggestam, 2008:4; Balducci, 2008:9). Through this neglect, proponents are considered to fail to capture the EU's “internal complexity” (Balducci, 2010:36), uncritically considering it “a single actor” (Balducci, 2008:9) and assuming a harmonisation of interests between its supranational and intergovernmental/national facets, the latter of which may have an asymmetric impact on foreign policy outcomes towards third countries (Aggestam 2008:4; Diez, 2013:198; Tocci, 2008).

This thesis acknowledges the role of EU member states, recognising that they have their own bilateral relationships with China which act independently and contribute holistically to EU-China relations. However, it focuses specifically on the EU-level dialogues with China, based on the assumption that the mandates of these dialogues and the officials implementing them are *pre-agreed* by not only member states, but the European Parliament too via co-decision.¹³ Having made this assumption, EU-China dialogues are arguably the most appropriate setting for assessing the practical implementation of the EU's normative power. This is similarly justified by NPE conceptualising the EU as supranational actor, distinct from its member states, and these exchanges reflecting the primary official-official contact point of EU-China relations.

Core criticisms surrounding prioritisation of EU material interests in the EU's external action

Departing from the above debates, it is crucial to address the most vocal criticisms of NPE. These surround assertions that the EU's material interests take precedence over its values in practice; an area branded by Diez (2013:201) as the “main empirical evidence

¹³ The principle of *co-decision* is central to the EU's decision-making. As the EU Commission (2012i) notes, “it is based on the principle of parity and means that neither institution (European Parliament or Council) may adopt legislation without the other's assent”.

against the EU as a normative power". It is upon this basis that existing literature often parsimoniously concludes that the EU *is not* a normative power, based on macro-level analysis focusing on the outcomes of the EU's external action.

Scholars highlight an *inconsistency* between how the EU promotes its values with third countries, despite a "comprehensive approach"¹⁴ (Panebianco, 2009:133) which has been designed to intensify the role of EU values in all aspects of the EU's external action. In this vein, normative conditionality is observed to be strictly enforced in the case of prospective member states (as a prerequisite for membership) and less powerful third countries dependent on development aid, wherein formal measures (i.e. joint actions/common positions) are often instigated if these actors contravene EU values, particularly human rights and democracy (Mattlin, 2012:184).

Conversely, scholars observe that in the case of major powers like China, where the EU has strong economic interests yet profound disagreements over values, the enforcement of EU values is far weaker in practice (Panebianco, 2009:131). Formal measures are observed to be eschewed in favour of softer "discursive" (*ibid.*) approaches in the form of non-binding statements or merely raising grievances in bilateral dialogues. However, existing literature does concede that this inconsistency derives not only from selective enforcement on the basis of material interests, but the EU lacking effective leverage (i.e. membership or aid) to employ conditionality in these more egalitarian power relations (Crookes, 2014:647; Panebianco, 2009:131; Schimmelfennig, 2009:19-21).

Criticisms along these lines arguably also notably underpin what can be described as *counter-conceptualisations* to NPE. These assert that the EU should be defined according to its material power, typically based upon observations of how the EU applies its significant economic power. In this context, Zimmerman (2007:813-818), argues from a rationalist perspective that the EU prioritises its self-interest, as opposed to its normative aspirations and thus reflects a *realist power*. Similarly, Damro's (2012i:683-689) *market power Europe* conceptualisation builds upon Manners' work in arguing that the EU's economic power, as opposed to its normative power, reflects its prevailing international identity, due to the EU's historical economic focus and significant institutional expertise in this area. For

¹⁴ This comprehensive approach is based upon the premise that between partners' economic growth/security is linked to their adherence to the (universal) norms propagated by the EU (Mattlin, 2012:181; Panebianco, 2009:133).

Damro (2012i:683, 697) the EU's economic power reflects the principal vehicle for meeting EU interests, including those connected to EU values.

Analytical challenges in distinguishing between EU values and interests

However, it is crucial to highlight that scholars propagating these criticisms of the EU's normative power, often neglect the complex relationship between the implementation of the EU's values and its interests. In this fashion, they may be prematurely *writing off* the EU's normative power.

As Aggestam (2008:8) highlights, it is important for scholars to recognise that values and interests are often "intertwined" in practice and that the EU, "like any other international actor, has mixed motives" (See also: Diez, 2005:625; 2013:201). For Youngs (2004:421), this practical overlap has been exacerbated by the EU's aforementioned *comprehensive approach* to its bilateral relations. Notably, the EU itself explicitly acknowledges this overlap in its 2016 Global Strategy describing how:

Our interests and values go hand in hand. We have an interest in promoting our values in the world. At the same time, our fundamental values are embedded in our interests. Peace and security, prosperity, democracy and a rules-based global order are the vital interests underpinning our external action. (EU, 2016i:13)

Reflecting this complex interrelationship, scholars emphasise the analytical and methodological challenges inherent in disaggregating EU values and interests. As Diez (2013:197) notes, it is "very difficult" in practice to "differentiate between foreign policy that is motivated by norms and foreign policy that is motivated by interests".

This observation is not new, being reminiscent of Goldstein and Keohane's (1993:3-30) seminal work where they rigorously problematize the distinction between ideational forces (i.e. values) and interests in practice. They emphasise how the lack of phenomenological separation between values and interests facilitates profound methodological challenges for scholars studying foreign policy outcomes (*ibid.*). The scholars highlight the complications associated with isolating individual ideational stimuli when actors are exposed to many international sources, as well as the difficulties in

distinguishing between individual policymaker's subjective beliefs and truly institutionalised normative influences (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:26-30)

Building on this, Diez (2013:201) highlights the broader difficulties present in distinguishing between policy outcomes informed by values and those based on interests. Citing the example of Western engagement with authoritarian regimes (like China), which are "less easy to judge" than commonly professed, he highlights how Western actors i) pursuing engagement or ii) severing ties/implementing sanctions, could both be legitimately considered strategies of promoting Western values. Reflecting this, Diez (2013:201) argues that criticisms that the EU prioritises its material interests over its values with third countries should be downplayed, casting such assertions as "problematic" and "impossible to prove". For Diez (2013:201), often "the normative argument can explain behaviour as much as an interest-based argument" (*See also*: Diez, 2005:625).

This thesis acknowledges the profound difficulties in assessing the *outcomes* of the EU's external action with third countries like China, based on whether they reflect a prioritisation of EU values or interests. To mitigate these analytical challenges and pursue an original contribution, this project instead focuses on the extent to which EU values are being practically operationalised by individual EU officials in EU-China dialogues and what challenges/facilitates these activities. In this sense, the emphasis is on the *processes* and dynamics at the micro-level as opposed to the outcomes of the EU's external action at the macro-level, which are much harder to assess in terms of motives/objectives.

Through this focus, it is possible to directly approach EU officials via the elite interview method (*See* Chapter 4) and ascertain the degree to which they are *consciously* and *purposefully* integrating values into their dialogues, in line with active practices inferred by NPE's mechanism of *procedural diffusion*. Similarly, this micro-level approach makes it possible to establish how institutional mechanisms are informing officials' value mainstreaming activities and the impact of the Chinese side upon them.

Crucially, as well as mitigating the ambiguity in distinguishing between values and interests in the EU's external action, which has been neglected by NPE studies to date, this thesis's micro-level focus also underpins its original contribution. It offers fresh insights into the nuances surrounding the practical implementation of the EU's normative power.

2.5 Chapter conclusion

Through defining NPE and unpacking the elements which are most relevant to the research question, it has been possible to construct a theoretical framework to address the research question. In this respect, NPE crucially defines the EU's values and makes it possible to isolate and assess the promotion of arguably the most pertinent values to EU-China relations: human rights and the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

Most significantly, NPE theorises the mechanisms used by the EU to practically operationalise its normative power, with procedural diffusion capturing the *active* and purposeful mainstreaming of EU values through EU-China dialogues. In addition, overt diffusion was revealed to theorise the important analytical distinction between EU officials based in Brussels and those based in Beijing. The latter individuals may have alternate knowledge-based approaches to value mainstreaming, due to their physical proximity to their counterparts.

Building on this, the chapter addressed the key debates in the literature connected to the research question, situating this thesis and highlighting its original contribution. To this end, the literature review revealed how existing literature often fails to critically assess how the EU's values are being diffused with third countries and the potential for values to flow in a two-way manner. This reflects a lack of reflexivity amongst scholars, with real-world implications for EU-China relations, which this thesis seeks to rectify.

Furthermore, the literature review highlighted how the strongest criticisms of NPE surrounded accusations that the EU's material interests take precedence over its values, leading to scholars rejecting the EU as a normative power. However, it was revealed that such assertions lacked analytical nuance, being based upon macro-level analysis of the outcomes of the EU's external action, which neglect the complex relationship between EU values and interests.

As result, it was highlighted that this thesis was pursuing an original micro-level approach, emphasising *processes* as opposed to *outcomes*. This approach captures the nuances of the EU's normative power through focusing on the extent to which individual EU officials are actively mainstreaming values into EU-China dialogues in practice, and the role/impact of institutional mechanisms and the Chinese side on these activities.

Chapter 3 – Contextualising the role of values in EU-China dialogues

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of EU-China relations and contextualises the role of EU values therein. Section 3.2 summarises the contemporary bilateral relationship and its historical development, before Section 3.3 describes the forefront economic relationship. Thereafter, the chapter addresses the comparatively underdeveloped political relationship and its roots in a fundamental disagreement over values. Reflecting this thesis's focus on the values of sustainable development and human rights, Section 3.4 details successful EU-China environmental and climate change cooperation, and Section 3.5 describes bilateral tensions on human rights. The final section of the chapter (3.6) focuses on how the EU promotes its values with China in practice.

3.2 The development of EU-China relations

Building relations: 1975-2003

Contemporary EU-China relations can be traced back to 1975. Formal diplomatic ties were established on the cusp of Deng Xiaoping's far-reaching economic reform programme, which opened China to international markets and fostered decades of high economic growth (Dai, 2006:5). This catalysed China's rise to become the world's second biggest economic and military power (Lanteigne, 2013:39).¹⁵

From this point, EU-China relations rapidly developed. The core economic basis of the partnership was established with a trade agreement in 1985, along with early academic/cultural exchanges and the first of many bilateral cooperation programmes and projects in the policy sectors of science and agriculture (Dai, 2006:5; EEAS, 2014:1; Men,

¹⁵ Deng's economic reforms sought to revive China's undeveloped and isolated economy through the opening up of domestic trade and the encouragement of international investment in designated *special economic zones* (Lanteigne, 2013:40). This had a colossal impact on China's economic growth, with Chinese real GDP averaging 9.3% 1980-2015 and total GDP quadrupling between 1978-2004, all of which aided China in facilitating immense foreign investment capacity, unrivalled foreign exchange reserves, and significant trade surpluses with its international partners (Lanteigne, 2013:40-42; Li, 2009:1-3; Wang, 2016:315).

2011:544-545).¹⁶ A European Commission delegation opened in Beijing, in 1988 (EEAS, 2014:1).

However, this intensification of relations was brought to a standstill by China's crackdown on student protests in Tiananmen square. The (then) European Communities¹⁷ froze the relationship and enacted a series of sanctions, mostly notably an arms embargo, which remains in place (Dai, 2006:5). While this signalled the beginning of significant political tensions in EU-China relations, the impasse was short-lived due to China's increasing economic importance, with bilateral exchanges largely returning to normal within three years (*ibid.*). The 1990s saw the political relationship expand significantly, with the establishment of dialogues in areas such as human rights and environmental protection, as well as the launch of annual bilateral summits in 1998 (Dai, 2006:5; EEAS, 2014:1; Yuan and Orbie, 2015:343).

Deepening relations: 2003 – Present

These attempts to “move beyond a commercial and economic relationship” (Maher, 2016:961) towards an equally meaningful political/security facet, reached a new level with the creation of a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2003 (Farnell and Crookes, 2016:3; Sachdeva, 2014:427). The Strategic Partnership is built around three pillars: *Political Dialogue, Economic & Sectoral Dialogue* and *People-to-People Dialogue* (from 2012) (EEAS, 2017i). These pillars include over 50 dialogues, covering a multiplicity of diverse policy sectors (Crookes, 2013:648; EEAS, 2017ii; ESPO, 2013; Maher, 2016:960). Each pillar is topped with a high-level strategic dialogue and collectively, an annual summit (*ibid.*). The Strategic Partnership's diverse dialogues also often inform a range of cooperation programmes and projects in mainland China (EEAS, 2017i). These co-funded and time-limited activities seek to further cooperation in specific areas and are often operationalised by civil society experts (EEAS, 2017i; EGP, 2014i).¹⁸ The format and typical outcomes of dialogues is further detailed in Chapter 5.6.

¹⁶ A flagship Science and technology cooperation programme was established in 1983, before the first bilateral cooperation project on management training rural development began the following year (EEAS, 2014:1). The first EC-China academic/cultural exchanges also took place in the 1980s (Dai, 2006:5).

¹⁷ The European Communities became the *European Union* with the 1993 Maastricht Treaty (EU, 2017iii).

¹⁸ Phone Interview with an official from the European Commission based in Beijing on 23.06.2015 at 4.00pm (CST), from Bath.

Scholars describe how shared strategic interests principally underpinned the evolution in EU-China relations embodied by the 2003 Strategic Partnership (Casarini, 2006:7). In this fashion, there was a common desire to manage complex international issues at the bilateral and multilateral levels, such as climate change, terrorism and the world economy (Geeraerts, 2013:4-5; Maher, 2016:959; Sachdeva, 2014:427-428). They mutually perceived such activities as a duty for major powers (*ibid.*).

Similarly, both actors promoted multipolarity and sought to counter the Bush Administration's (2000-08) assertive unipolarity (Sachdeva, 2014:428). In this regard, China considered the EU an alternative pole to hedge against a perceived US containment strategy in East Asia (Casarini, 2006:13). These broad objectives are reflected in the foreword to the joint 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, which notes that:

The world of today is experiencing profound and complex changes. As important actors in a multipolar world, the EU and China share responsibility for promoting peace, prosperity and sustainable development for the benefit of all. (EEAS, 2013:2)

Notably, the EU also hoped that facilitating closer relations with China would hasten its political reform, moulding it into a more dependable international partner, which adhered to dominant international norms and standards (Maher, 2016:961).

However, despite these shared ambitions, scholars observe how interests between the two actors have diverged over time. Strategic priorities have evolved since 2003. The EU has been preoccupied with internal regional concerns surrounding migration and a resurgent Russia, in the face of an "erosion" (Farnell and Crookes, 2016:3) of its economic and political status (Maher, 2016:966; Yuan and Orbie, 2015:337-338). Conversely, China has sought to project its growing power globally to assert itself, particularly through countering US regional and international dominance (*ibid.*).

Reflecting this, beyond successful bilateral cooperation on the Iran nuclear deal, the EU and China have expressed conflicting positions on high-profile international issues such as development aid and the crises in Ukraine and Syria, both of which have had significant EU security implications (EU, 2016:11; Fox and Godement, 2009:9; Maher, 2016:966, 970). More broadly, China's increasing power and influence has also been problematic for the international promotion of the EU's values and economic standards, rhetorically cast as the *rules-based world order* on the EU side (EEAS, 2017i). These tensions are reflected

in the EU's China Strategy (*Elements for a new strategy on China [2016]*), which describes how:

The rise of China has happened with unprecedented scale and speed. Not only is China different internally than it was before the current leadership took over in 2013, but China's increased weight and a renewed emphasis on "going global" mean that it is seeking a bigger role and exerting greater influence on an evolving system of global governance ...The EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation fulfils an important role ...But the EU needs its own strategy, one which puts its own interests at the forefront in the new relationship; which promotes universal values; which ...helps to define an increased role for China in the international system; and is based on a positive agenda of partnership coupled with the constructive management of differences. (EU, 2016ii)

Two key examples particularly display how China's interests have conflicted with the EU's. Firstly, in 2011 China orchestrated the 16+1 formation (institutionalised in 2013) which brings together eleven EU member states (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) and five candidate states (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM, Montenegro, and Serbia) from Central/Eastern Europe, *plus* China (CEEC, 2018; Fallon 2015:145). Although these 11 EU member states have been keen to take advantage of Chinese trade and investment (particularly concerning infrastructure) and educational/cultural exchanges, there has been concern at the EU-level that the formation is designed to undermine EU unity. It is often cast as a "divide and conquer" (Turcsányi, 2014:2) strategy by China.

Similarly, the global scale and ambition of China's *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) has significant implications for the EU's international interests, particularly in terms of maintaining its interpretation of economic norms and universal values. Through the BRI, China is recreating the ancient silk road between China and Europe (Wang, 2016:1). It is investing hundreds of billions of USD in infrastructure to build one sea route and three multi-regional land routes, which collectively encompass over 60 countries, 30% of the world's GDP and 64% of its population (Du and Zhang, 2018:191; Huang, 2016:318-320; Wang, 2016:22-25). The EU's most pressing concerns include the recognition of international labour and environment standards, the opacity of individual projects,

discrimination against Western companies for project procurement and the dangers of overburdening target states with debts (EU, 2017).

Reflecting the above developments, scholars consider the Strategic Partnership to have been largely unsuccessful in its ambitions. As Farnell and Crookes (2016:4) note, it is “widely acknowledged (if not officially) that the results of the strategic partnership have been disappointing”. Fox and Godement (2009:9) pertinently highlight how the EU has failed in shaping China’s international actorness and its increasing assertiveness is now posing a challenge to the EU’s normative power (*See also*: Geeraerts, 2013:4, 7; Yuan and Orbie, 2015:337-338).

3.3 EU-China economic relations

Despite the conflicting strategic interests described above, the foundational economic component of EU-China relations and the numerous dialogues underpinning it, has continued to expand under the strategic partnership (*See also*: Geeraerts, 2013:11; Sachdeva, 2014:427). As Men (2011:544) notes, it reflects the “indispensable link” between the partners. Since China opened its economy to global markets, EU-China total annual trade in goods and services has grown exponentially, from €6 billion in 1980 to €582.7 billion in 2016 (EU Commission, 2018vi; Sachdeva, 2014:429;). This encompasses, €514.8 trade in goods and €69.7 in services.¹⁹ The European Commission’s latest data suggests that annual trade in goods alone has risen to €604.6 billion in 2018, surpassing the total for goods and services combined in 2016 and highlighting the substantial growth rates in EU-China trade flows (EU Commission, 2019i:2). These contemporary figures equate to over €1.5 billion in bilateral trade per day and make China the EU’s second biggest economic partner and the EU, China’s largest (EU Commission, 2018vi).²⁰

This dramatic growth of the EU-China economic relationship and its role as the nexus of material power between the partners, derives from mutual interests. China has historically perceived the EU as a vehicle for capital, technology and expertise to fuel its

¹⁹ The EU’s primary imports from China are “industrial and consumer goods, machinery and equipment, and footwear and clothing” and its key exports are “machinery and equipment, motor vehicles, aircraft, and chemicals” (EU Commission, 2018vi).

²⁰ Providing greater insight into this, China accounted for 15.4% of the EU’s total global trade in goods in 2018 and the EU, 14.7% of China’s (EU Commission, 2019i:8).

domestic development and systemic rise, while the EU has been keen to exploit the colossal opportunities offered by China's market for European businesses and more recently, its surplus capital for investment (Casarini, 2006:11-12; Farnell and Crookes, 2016:4).

In the contemporary relationship, these mutual economic interests remain constant if not more pressing, as both actors face common challenges (Farnell and Crookes, 2016:4). These include natural resource management, job creation, an "ageing labour force" (*ibid.*) and more recently, trade conflict with an increasingly protectionist United States (US) (CNBC, 2018).

Tensions in EU-China economic relations

However, despite its continued growth, the economic relationship is subject to notable tensions which significantly impact EU-China relations. These surround the EU's allegations that China is pursuing anti-competitive economic policies which are resulting in the relationship being of greater benefit to China than the EU. Firstly, the EU actively imposes anti-dumping measures against Chinese goods being exported to Europe at below-market rates, with prominent examples including solar panels and steel (See: ECFR, 2016i:133). These activities, which are enabled by China providing state aid to subsidise its businesses - particularly state owned enterprises or SOEs - have informed the EU refusing to recognise China as having *Market Economic Status* (MES) under World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules (Casarini, 2006:16; Farnell and Crookes, 2016:88).²¹ While this denial of status allows the EU to impose, from its perspective, necessary trade defence measures, China considers the issue a question of mutual respect and equality (Casarini, 2006:16).

Most explicitly, the imbalance in the economic relationship can be observed through a substantial trade deficit in goods (176.6 billion) and services (8.8 billion) and not only very low, but declining EU foreign direct investment (FDI), while China's investments in Europe

²¹ This conflict came to a head in 2016/2017, with China arguing that the WTO accession clause allowing other members to treat it as a non-market economy when assessing dumping duties had now expired according to WTO rules (Euractiv, 2016i). China maintained that the EU (like the US and Japan) had to treat it as a market economy (*ibid.*). The EU responded with a change in its international trading legislation which allows its anti-dumping policies to continue with China, without punitively singling it out.

continue to rise (EU Commission, 2014i:1; 2018vi).²² This trade deficit derives from the significant barriers to market access faced by European businesses in China (along with foreign businesses more broadly). This situation contrasts dramatically with the open access to European markets accorded to China. Barriers include a lack of transparency and unpredictability in legislation, opaque property rights, weak rule of law (particularly surrounding intellectual property protection) and preferential treatment for Chinese companies (particularly SOEs) (EC, 2014i:2; ECCC, 2016:4; Farnell and Crookes, 2016:4; Geeraerts, 2013:12).²³

The impact of this hostile environment for European businesses is reflected in the European Chamber of Commerce in China's (EUCCC) 2018 Businesses Confidence Survey. 46% of respondents maintained that they were missing opportunities based on barriers to market access - 48% identified ambiguous legislation as the greatest obstacle - and half believed that doing business was becoming "more difficult" and "the regulatory environment [would] ...worsen over the next five years" (EUCCC, 2018).

China and the EU are seeking to redress these issues and effectively rebalance the economic relationship from *China-wins* to truly *win-win*, through the negotiation of a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) (EU Commission, 2014ii). This would remove barriers to European investment in China, through elements such as investment protection,²⁴ improved market access and rules regulating the role of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (De Jonquieres, 2015:3; ECFR, 2015i; 2015ii:84; EU Commission, 2014ii; Farnell and Crookes, 2016:110-111). However, progress is proving very slow since the negotiations began in 2014 (EEAS, 2016iii). It has taken two years to agree on the scope of the agreement and as of summer 2018, the details have yet to be agreed, much to the frustration of the EU side (*ibid.*).

²² The European Commission notes that "Investment flows... show vast untapped potential" (EU Commission, 2016:1). Investments in China by European businesses are continuing to decline from already low levels (See: EEAS, 2016ii; ECCC:2016:4). Conversely, investment by Chinese businesses in the EU is increasing by as much as 44% per annum (ECCC, 2016:25). As the ECCC (2016:5) notes, this merely "serves to highlight the many areas where European business is prohibited, or at best restricted, from making similar investments in China".

²³ The Chinese government discriminates against European businesses through industrial policies promoting "domestic (Chinese) champion companies...[and] protecting or nurturing strategic industries" (Covington and Burling, 2014:6) as well as 'government-backed' research and development public procurement favouring tenders with indigenous intellectual property (*ibid.* pp. 6, 11).

²⁴ This surrounds the "the rules governing the ownership of foreign investments, the right to compensation in the event of expropriation, and the procedures for applying these rules" (Farnell and Crookes, 2016:110).

Scholars attribute this pace to China's fears about the requisite economic liberalisation upsetting powerful vested interests associated with SOEs and unleashing destabilising social forces (Farnell and Crookes, 2016:112-113). At the time of writing, it remains to be seen whether the Trump Administration's (2016-) protectionist tariffs against China (based on similar grievances to the EU) and those threatened against the EU, will catalyse a breakthrough in the negotiations (CNBC, 2018, EEAS, 2018i).

3.4 EU-China environmental and climate change cooperation

Introduction

Contrasting with the scale and relative success of the economic relationship, EU-China political relations, despite spanning many policy sectors and the ambitions of the Strategic Partnership, remain comparatively underdeveloped (Farnell and Crookes, 2016:4). Dialogues in key areas such as Science (where Horizon 2020 funds cutting-edge collaboration between EU and Chinese researchers in many areas²⁵), communications technologies and connectivity (i.e. infrastructure/transport connected to BRI) take place at senior levels and have yielded tangible results (See: EEAS, 2017i; EU Commission, 2018vii).

However, it is environmental and climate change cooperation, underpinned by the EU value of *sustainable development*, that reflects a standout area of EU-China political relations. For clarification, environment and climate change reflect two overlapping policy sectors seeking to mitigate the negative effects of economic growth on the environment, with the former largely focusing on micro-solutions at the national level and the latter more concerned with macro-solutions at the multilateral level (See: EEAS, 2016i).

Much like the economic relationship, the interconnected sectors have gained prominence in the political relationship due to mutual interest (Carrapatoso, 2015:18). While the EU has aspired to become an international leader in tackling global climate change, China, as one of the largest greenhouse gas emitters, has sought to mitigate the negative effects of its rapid economic development (De Cock, 2011:89; EEAS, 2016i; Scott, 2009:213). China

²⁵ These include food; agriculture; biotechnologies; sustainable urbanisation; aviation and aeronautics environment and climate action; energy (non-nuclear); peaceful uses of nuclear energy; information and communication technologies; and space.

has viewed the EU as a uniquely credible partner which can offer valuable expertise, technologies and investment (*ibid.*).

Importantly, this synthesis of interests is matched by a level of mutual political understanding and respect which appears absent from the remainder of the political relationship (Scott, 2009:212). China recognises the EU's normative agenda and expertise, while the EU displays an awareness of the challenges posed by China's ongoing development/reforms for the implementation of environmental policies, namely the need for continued economic growth (Carrapatoso, 2015:179-180). For these reasons, as noted in Chapter 2.3.2, the environmental dimension of sustainable development can be seen to reflect the least controversial value in EU-China relations.

Key developments in EU-China environmental and climate change relations

Reflecting this successful convergence between values and material interests, significant developments have taken place at the bilateral and multilateral levels. The establishment of the EU-China Partnership on Climate Change in (2005), which includes commitments to tackle global climate change and reduce mutual energy consumption as well as a sustainable development chapter in the *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation* (2013), have set the scene for productive dialogues and many bilateral cooperation programmes and projects in mainland China (EU Commission, 2005:1; EEAS, 2013; 2017iii; Farnell and Crookes, 2016:179-180).

Additionally, cooperation on carbon emissions trading has dramatically evolved in recent years, under the auspices of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) (EU Commission, 2005i:4).²⁶ EU businesses have become majority investors in the Chinese emissions market, while the EU facilitated China's first nationwide emissions trading system (i.e. between Chinese provinces) in 2017 (De Cock, 2011:100-102; EEAS, 2016iv; EU Commission, 2017i). At the multilateral level, both actors have also adopted a leading role in international climate mitigation. They have co-represented developed and developing countries through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

²⁶ Linked to the 1992 Kyoto Protocol, the CDM ostensibly allows developed countries (in this case EU member states) to contribute to their own carbon emission targets by aiding developing countries (such as China) to reduce their emissions (De Cock, 2011:102; Scott, 2009:215, 216).

(UNFCCC) and have been instrumental in the historic signing of the Paris Agreement in 2016 (ECFR, 2016:138).²⁷

Conversely, it is important to highlight that environment and climate cooperation is not tension-free. China's reluctance to incorporate non-state actors into cooperation programmes and projects has frustrated the EU, while there have been concerns that free technology transfers to China risk undermining the EU's leadership in environmental technologies, giving away valuable intellectual property to partner who can pay for it (Farnell and Crookes, 2016:179-181; Scott, 2009:218). This reflects an interesting conflict between the EU's normative objective of climate change mitigation and its economic interests.

Additionally, it is also important to highlight that, although there is normative alignment on the environmental dimension of sustainable development, China does not fully approximate it, having its own interpretation called *ecological civilisation*. This may allude to the existence of the nuanced dynamics posited in Chapter 2.4, with China potentially reframing and developing a distinct *Chinese* variation of the EU value of sustainable development. It also supports the notion that values are flowing *two ways* in EU-China dialogues, with ecological civilisation being, in turn, diffused with the EU. However, the analysis in Chapter 7.4 suggests that the EU tends to be dismissive of ecological civilisation and its distinctiveness from sustainable development. While the concept's isolated *environmental focus* re-affirms the importance of disentangling the non-controversial environmental dimension of sustainable development from its economic and social facets (described in Section 2.3.2), it is worth also briefly detailing how ecological civilisation differs in substance.

Firstly, the concept is distinct in being framed according to specific Chinese cultural features. Ecological civilisation presents environmental protection as *civilised behaviour*, connecting such activities with the prevailing values in society, to which individuals are judged according to the socio-cultural Confucian hierarchy (described in Section 3.5).²⁸ Secondly, the concept differs in its tailoring to China's domestic circumstances. To maintain economic growth, ecological civilisation permits the perpetuation of coal power

²⁷ The historic agreement encompasses a comment from all nations to "undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects" as well as keeping "global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels" (UNFCCC, 2018).

²⁸ Interview with an individual working for an environmental NGO, 25.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

and increased car ownership on the basis that technology is being pursued which mitigates emissions (i.e. carbon capture for coal power plants) (See: UNEP, 2016). This is at odds with the environmental dimension of sustainable development, which seeks to reduce all sources of pollution.

Overall, as Scott (2009:220) observes, both sides have dedicated significant efforts to make a success of environmental cooperation, viewing it as a springboard for strengthening other areas of the political relationship (See: Yuan and Orbie, 2015:350). While progress in these overlapping sectors has been partly reflective of mutual self-interest, in the context of assessing the practical implementation of the EU's normative power, this thesis is seeking to explore the *normative basis* of this cooperation. It aims to gain insights into how EU officials practically mainstream sustainable development in dialogues and the extent to which lessons can be learned for effectively promoting more controversial EU values.

3.5 The EU-China *value gap*

The comparatively underdeveloped nature of EU-China political relations versus the economic relationship, is largely attributable to a fundamental disagreement over values (Crookes, 2013:643; Maher, 2016:962). As Crookes (2013:643) notes, this has "limited and will continue to limit the scope and depth of any EU-China strategic relationship". While the EU maintains that China should reform in line with its *universal* values, China rejects these values and their claimed universality (Maher, 2016:962-963). For China, the EU's values reflect exclusively Western constructs (*ibid.*).

Within this context, although the EU value of *liberal democracy* conflicts with China's authoritarian political system, it is effectively so sensitive for China - considered an existential threat²⁹ - that it is kept off the table by the EU (Maher, 2016:964; Mattlin, 2012:187). *Rule of law* on the other hand, does feature prominently in EU-China relations, with alternative interpretations impacting many areas of political and economic cooperation (Maher, 2016:964). However, it is human rights, which encompasses and is enabled by rule of law, that reflects the highest profile normative conflict in the bilateral

²⁹ Maher (2016:963-964) notes that leaked Chinese government memo known as 'Document No. 9' cited western constitutional democracy as one of "seven perils threatening its authority".

relationship and the focus of academic literature (Maher, 2016:964; Mattlin, 2012:190; Panebianco, 2009:140; Shen, 2013:170).

Disagreement over human rights has increased since Xi Jinping became President in 2013, with China's human rights environment widely perceived to have significantly deteriorated amidst a broad crackdown on political dissent (AFET, 2015:13; ECFR, 2015ii:88; 2016i:128; Maher, 2016:964). The EU has been particularly vocal about the arrest/detainment/conviction of over "300 lawyers and human rights defenders" (EEAS, 2016v; 2016vi) from mid-2015 and more recently, extra-judicial internment of Uighurs in Xinjiang (See: EEAS, 2018ii). EU officials and academics also express concern that China's integration of big data, artificial intelligence and facial recognition, embodied by China's evolving *social credit* system, is likely to engender worsening human rights conditions and thus increased bilateral conflict (See: ABC, 2018; BBC, 2018i; Business Insider, 2018; HRW 2017i; 2017ii).³⁰

3.5.1 The EU and China's differing interpretations of human rights

The controversy over human rights derives from different interpretations of the value on each side (Men, 2011:549; Panebianco, 2009:143). While the EU interpretation attaches equal importance to collective socio-economic rights and individual civil and political rights, China promotes a conceptualisation of the value which privileges collective socio-economic rights (Panebianco, 2009:143; See also: Men, 2011:536; *The Epoch Times*, 2015; Zhao, 2015:48). This understanding is underpinned by a perception that "the right to subsistence is the most fundamental" (Men, 2011:543) component of human rights, meaning that its attainment through economic development is considered a prerequisite to the of realisation of individual civil and political rights (Panebianco, 2009:143; See also: *The Epoch Times*, 2015; Zhao, 2015:48).³¹ As Li Junhua³² stated at the press conference following the 2015 33rd EU-China human rights dialogue:

³⁰ Interviews with diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels and 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm in Bath.

³¹ Scholars highlight how this Chinese understanding of human rights is displayed in its 1982 constitution and its chapter on the "fundamental rights and duties of citizens" (Men, 2011:543; See also: Zhao, 2015:40).

³² Li Junhua is Director-general of the Department of International Organizations and Conferences. He has been the Chinese co-chair for most EU-China human rights dialogues in recent years.

When we look at the issue of human rights, I think the European perspective and the Chinese perspective differ...From the EU perspective, I think the human rights are very much focused on the civil liberties, the right of government, but in China, we're talking about the right to development and the right to survival. (*The Epoch Times*, 2015)

This alternative interpretation of human rights has a strong historical and cultural basis, which challenges the argued universality of the EU position. Firstly, as Men (2011:540-541) highlights, China has experienced over 2,000 years of authoritarian governance, based on value systems which differ markedly from those in European history. Imperial China's main "governing ideology" (Guo, 2013:47) was *Confucianism*, which continues to strongly impact contemporary Chinese political culture.³³ The school of thought casts social harmony as a product of maintaining a strict hierarchy where those who display the highest virtue, through superior education and morality, should be entrusted with authority (Guo, 2013:48-50).

To realise this social harmony and *collective* societal good, every individual in society was expected to conform to their role in the hierarchy, fulfilling duties as a subject to their ruler, as opposed to any question of individual rights which would threaten and undermine the system (*ibid.*). As Guo (2013:53) summarises, "Confucianism is a collectivistic-based value system" which is "essentially hostile to individualism".

The other key philosophical school which influences the Chinese interpretation of human rights is *Legalism*. The pre-Confucian school of thought³⁴ promotes highly centralised governance wherein an extensive bureaucracy reports to a central ruler, as well as a strict judicial system where any transgression leads to severe punishment. These prescriptions are considered an essential prerequisite for social order and state stability by Legalism (Guo, 2013:51-52). Like Confucianism, legalist principles emphasise the greater collective good of the state and de-emphasise individual rights. Moreover, they continue to impact contemporary Chinese governance (Guo, 2013:52), underpinning a lasting perception that

³³ The school of thought is based on the writing/teachings of philosopher Kǒng Fūzǐ (551–479 BC), Latinised as Confucius (Guo, 2013:48).

³⁴ Legalism was the governing ideology China's first imperial dynasty, the Qin Dynasty (221–206BC). The ideology emerged during the Warring states period (475–221 BC) in Chinese history, wherein its prescriptions helped empower the Qin state to defeat its rivals and unify China, under the leadership of Qin Shi Huangdi (Guo, 2013:47).

ultra-centralisation and strict law and order is crucial to governing a country of 1.3 billion people across 23 provinces.

This precedent for an alternative interpretation of human rights is further compounded by China's modern history. After the collapse of Imperial China, catalysed by the actions of European colonial powers,³⁵ Chinese intellectuals perceived the independence, sovereignty and material prosperity of the state (i.e. the collective good) as a necessary precursor to the plight of individual citizens, in rejuvenating the nation (Men, 2011:540; Zhao, 2015:48). This sentiment was consolidated by the 1949 Chinese revolution, with the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the emergent People's Republic of China prioritising collective socio-economic rights.

Ultimately, China's historical and cultural basis for human rights differs dramatically from the European experience of the *Enlightenment*, where the promotion of individualism evolved to foster contemporary European human rights principles (Panebianco, 2009:143). However, it is important to highlight that this disagreement over human rights (and other EU values) goes beyond cultural differences. The interpretation of human rights expressed by the Chinese government reflects an *official position* established and enforced by party-state structures (i.e. as a *party line*) (See Section 5.5.2). This party-state discourse is heavily informed by the practical maintenance of the Communist Party's totalitarian rule, with the parallel realisation of socio-economic rights and individual civil and political rights considered a threat to systemic stability (Panebianco, 2009:142; Men, 2011:549).³⁶ As Men (2011:544) notes, learning from the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party considers political reform to be "complementary and even secondary to economic reform" and that "rapid political change can lead to chaos and collapse of the country".

In turn, it is important to highlight that unlike the EU's values, which are enabled by and largely representative of the views held by European civil society, the *official* Chinese interpretation of human rights is not necessarily reflective of that held by Chinese civil

³⁵ The ruling Qing dynasty was progressively weakened by the actions of European Colonial powers. This included the control of Chinese customs administration, seizure of territory and reparations levied by the British Empire after China's loss of two Opium wars (1840-42 and 1857-60) (Guo, 2013:59-60). Moreover, Britain and other European powers extracted exclusive trading rights to parts of China following its defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) (*ibid.*).

³⁶ There are pervasive fears that "autonomous social forces such as organised interest groups" (Panebianco, 2009:142) could de-rail China's national development/reforms under the stewardship of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Men, 2011:549).

society (e.g. academics, activists, NGO practitioners). In this sense, there is a distinction to be made between *official* and *non-official* China. As described above, challenges to the party-state discourse on sensitive values like human rights by civil society, are actively suppressed - and in an increasingly assertive manner - in Xi Jinping's China, with those responsible risking arrest and imprisonment.

Reflecting the scale and depth of the conflict over human rights between the EU and China, the value can be considered the most controversial value in the bilateral relationship and thus the most challenging dimension of the EU's normative power to realise in practice. For this reason, it reflects a key focus of this thesis and a counterpoint to the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

3.6 The practical implementation of the EU's normative power in EU-China relations

The EU's strategy to tackle this disagreement over values has evolved over time. While the EU initially adopted an assertive approach to operationalising its normative power with China following the Tiananmen crackdown, a *constructive engagement* strategy emerged in the mid-late 1990s (Kinzelbach and Thelle, 2011:61; Men, 2011:546; Panebianco, 2009:139). This sought to engender reform in China through a more pragmatic approach, seeking to promote the EU's values through increasing engagement with China, a rationale embodied by the plethora of dialogues created by the strategic partnership (*ibid.*).

While the constructive engagement strategy partly envisions indirect promotion of EU values through exposing China to the EU's standards and ideas (Casarini, 2006:21; Panebianco, 2009:139), official documents emphasise that the EU values are also intended to explicitly feature in EU-China dialogues and be actively mainstreamed by EU officials (See Chapter 6.2).³⁷ Nevertheless, existing literature focuses almost exclusively on the promotion of human rights through the EU-China human rights dialogue, the advent of which was catalysed by the introduction of the constructive engagement strategy (Kinzelbach, 2015:44).

³⁷ See Chapter 6, which establishes the EU's official discourse on value mainstreaming and the standards it prescribes for EU officials operationalising EU-China dialogues.

The EU-China human rights dialogue

The contemporary EU-China human rights dialogue consists of an annual exchange involving the *reciprocal* discussion of each side's human rights record (Kinzelbach and Thelle, 2011:63; Panebianco, 2009:140-141; Shen, 2013:173). The dialogue emerged in 1995, suggested by the Chinese side in exchange for the EU ceasing annual condemnation of its human rights record through the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR),³⁸ at the multilateral level (Kinzelbach, 2015:26, 31 Kinzelbach and Thelle, 2011:61; Shen, 2013:169). China's Tiananmen crackdown had triggered a coordinated public approach by the EU and the US in the form of a co-sponsored UNCHR annual draft resolution (*ibid.*, p.25). This action was fuelling unprecedented international outrage and scrutiny of China's human rights record in the context of a "general optimism among Western powers" about democratic transitions, following the collapse of the Soviet Union (*ibid.*). In response to this negative pressure, which effectively constituted an existential threat, China was eager to stymie these multilateral resolutions, while satisfying the EU side's need to promote human rights (*ibid.* p.25-26).

Notably, China's resulting suggestion for a structured dialogue on human rights capitalised on a growing desire amongst EU member states - led by France and Germany - to improve EU-China relations, particularly in order to realise national material interests (Kinzelbach, 2015:26; Kinzelbach and Thelle, 2011:61). The dialogue framework reflected a *compromise option* for the EU side, which *unfroze* EU-China relations while providing a platform for the EU to address human rights concerns with China (Kinzelbach, 2015:27).

Although the EU initially refused to give into China's demands to trade the dialogue for an end to the annual UN resolutions, with dialogues in 1995 and 1996 taking place nonetheless, China used these early dialogues to lobby their demand and a split vote on the annual resolution by member states in 1997 compromised the necessary unity on the EU side (Kinzelbach 2015:32). This effectively closed the "political deal" (Kinzelbach and Thelle, 2011:61) between the EU and China, with regular dialogues taking the place of annual resolutions thereafter.

While the EU unlocked economic relations with China through this development, in the context of human rights promotion with China, the key beneficiary appeared to be the

³⁸ The United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) is the predecessor of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

Chinese side. A closed-door, opaque dialogue which compartmentalised discussion of human rights into a single EU-China exchange, reflected a far more attractive prospect for China than an annual public spotlight by the international community (Shen, 2013:170). This reading is reaffirmed by scholars and NGOs which consider the establishment of the human rights dialogue framework a symbolic victory for the Chinese side in the neutralisation of “Western European criticism” (Wan, 2001:83) and a capitulation by the EU (*See also*: Kinzelbach, 2015:30). As Wan (2001:83) suggests, the litmus test for the human rights dialogue is its capacity to serve as a “source of real pressure for change”.

The dialogue initially took place on a biannual basis and was accompanied by human rights seminars from 1998, that brought together civil society groups from each side (Panebianco, 2009:141; Kinzelbach and Thelle, 2011:64). However, the introduction of the rotating presidency with the Lisbon Treaty informed a transition to a single annual exchange from 2010,³⁹ while the seminars were dropped altogether due their controversy and low productivity.⁴⁰ Accounts from participants describe how the Chinese side tightly controlled the contribution of Chinese participants to these seminars and limited their contact with the EU side (HRIC, 2010). On several occasions, the substance or inclusion of particular NGOs, led the Chinese delegation to interrupt or walk out of sessions (HRIC, 2010; Kinzelbach and Thelle, 2011:65). These dynamics informed the EU participants often focusing solely on a European context to avoid upsetting their Chinese counterparts (HRIC, 2010).

Concerning the contemporary annual dialogue, the EU commonly raises concerns about China’s large-scale use of the death penalty, allegations of torture, freedom of expression/belief and minority rights (particularly in the context of Xinjiang and Tibet) (EU Commission, 2016:194; Panebianco, 2009:140). Promoting China’s compliance and

³⁹ Interviews with diplomats from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am and 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

⁴⁰ The seminars were devised by the British Presidency of the EU in 1998. They were fully funded by the EU side and involved academics, NGOs and officials from each side discussing human rights issues as means of exposing the “Chinese government to international human rights standards and EU best practice” (Panebianco, 2009:141), as well as feeding discussions in the bilateral dialogue and proposing new ideas for cooperation projects (*See also*: Casarini, 2006:19; HRIC, 2010).

The topics of the seminars were informed by bilateral negotiations which tended to lead to two topics for each seminar (one picked by each side). According to Kinzelbach and Thelle (2011:69) the EU tended to prioritise issues such as “the death penalty, torture, freedom of expression and right to fair trial”, while China opted for “low-sensitivity” topics such as “right to health, the rights of persons with disabilities, women’s and children’s rights, and corporate social responsibility”.

ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which it signed in 1998, is also considered a key objective. This reflects part of broader efforts by the EU to lobby China on the basis that it should adhere to multilateral human rights frameworks that it has acceded to, in line with EU interpretations (EU Council, 2015:305; 2016:194). This extends to the human rights provisions in China's own constitutional and criminal law (*ibid.*).

The EU also demands information about individual cases in China (e.g. pertaining to specific people/incidents of concern) during each instalment of the dialogue. Such practices are strongly opposed by China, which views them as contrary to the "principles of mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs" (MoFA, 2014). During dialogues, the Chinese side has tended to raise concerns about the rights of migrants and ethnic minorities in the EU (EEAS, 2018ii; Shen, 2013:173).

Assessing the human rights dialogue

Academic and internal EU assessments are critical about the effectiveness of the EU-China human rights dialogue. Panebianco (2009:141) states that there is "no sight yet of a considerable improvement" in China's human rights standards and Fox and Godement (2009:8) describe the dialogues as "inconclusive talking shops" (*See also*: Baker, 2002:60, 62; Balducci, 2010:51; Men, 2011:546; Mattlin, 2012:189-190; Shen, 2013:172-173). Kinzelbach and Thelle (2011:79) highlight a more fundamental deficiency of the EU-China human rights dialogue, noting that it is:

Based on the (false) premise that a negotiation and exchange between equal partners is taking place, while in reality part A aims at changing part B and part B knows it and does not accept it.

Echoing this academic criticism, internal assessments carried out by various EU institutions are consistently critical about the dialogue and its incapacity achieve progress (*See*: EU Council, 2015:305-307; 2016i:194-197; EU Commission, 2006:4-5). These internal and external criticisms suggest that China has indeed emerged as the chief beneficiary from the establishment of the human rights dialogue, as opposed to the EU. The EU appears to have traded hard-hitting public criticism at the multilateral level for a

compartmentalisation of human rights discussion with China to an unproductive and opaque bilateral dialogue.

However, existing literature often fails to provide insight into the micro-level dynamics between EU and Chinese officials. The dialogue is criticised purely based on its outcomes, while little attention has been paid to the actual processes underpinning it and the approaches of each side. The conflictual dynamics hinted at by press releases following each dialogue and the collapse of the human rights seminar system, suggest that *both sides* are playing a role in the dialogues apparent inefficacy.

Assessing the EU's normative power beyond the human rights dialogue

Existing literature also importantly neglects to provide insights into extent to which EU values are being practically mainstreamed in *all other 50+ EU-China dialogues* along with the micro-dynamics informing this. Instead, scholars tend to focus on a broad, macro-level appraisal, of the constructive engagement strategy.

Aligning with the dominant criticisms of NPE,⁴¹ they argue that the EU's material interests take precedence over its values with China in practice (See: Balducci, 2008:27; Forsberg, 2011:119; Panebianco, 2009:144; Sachdeva, 2014:427). For example, Fox and Godement (2009:2) cast the constructive engagement strategy as “unconditional engagement”, describing how China is given unrestricted access to the (mutually beneficial) EU-China economic relationship, without any value-related prerequisites. Similarly, Mattlin (2012:189) argues that “concrete material interests still dominate” and alludes to limited value mainstreaming in practice, noting that:

The human rights dialogue ...has become practically the only venue where the EU is still trying to maintain at least a façade of a commitment to human rights.

Additionally, scholars neglect to make any distinction between the EU officials based in Brussels and those working from the delegation in Beijing. Due to their physical location, the latter may display alternate knowledge-based approaches to promoting EU values. Relatedly, the role of Chinese cultural and linguistic skills amongst EU officials is generally given little attention by scholars. The role of these skills in the practical implementation of

⁴¹ Please note that NPE literature and EU-China literature is not strictly divided and there are many NPE articles focusing on EU-China relations.

the EU's normative power appears to be particularly neglected. Works which do incorporate the role of cultural-linguistic knowledge, suggest that it reflects a potentially high-impact factor in EU-China cooperation. In this fashion, Burnay et al. (2014:50) describe how:

A lack of mutual understanding ...[deriving from] an obvious language problem, a weak awareness of regional history and economic political and cultural realities ... [which] is particularly significant on the European side.

Similarly, Fulda (2015:274) describes a “low level of intercultural knowledge and trust in relations between Europe and China” and how linguistic and cultural knowledge represent some of the “main constraints and barriers” (ibid. p. 281) to bilateral cooperation. For Fulda (2015:274), the considerable differences in language and culture mean that the risk and cost of misunderstandings are “high”. It can be inferred that in the context of mainstreaming controversial values like human rights, these risks and costs are increased.

Fulda's (2018) work on European *citizen diplomats* – civil society individuals involved in assuaging difficult bilateral relationships⁴² - reinforces the apparent value of these skills in EU-China relations. Fulda (2018:9-11) observed that these individuals had successfully navigated China's “treacherous political-administrative landscape” largely as a product of their profound “intercultural knowledge” and capacity to collaborate with their Chinese counterparts (See *also*: Fulda, 2015:11-13). This included their ability to navigate within the “red lines” (Fulda, 2018:9) of Chinese cultural and social norms, as well as a reflexivity about their own cultural assumptions and an openness to new perspectives (*ibid.*, p. 11-17).

While these civil society individuals are distinct from EU officials in their *non-official* capacity, they arguably face similar challenges, having to build relationships with Chinese officials, who must approve and monitor their activities, particularly following China's 2015 NGO law (Fulda, 2018:9, 15). As a result, it is possible that these skills have

⁴² Fulda (2018:2) describes citizen diplomacy as reflecting “an alternative problem-solving strategy underpinning the role that non-state actors may play in mitigating difficult interstate relations and help resolve deep-rooted conflicts that political leaders and the private sector cannot solve alone” (See *also*: Fulda, 2015:273).

comparable worth in EU-China dialogues, aiding the discussion of controversial EU values like human rights.

The EU-China Legal Affairs dialogue

Another potentially significant dimension of the EU's normative power with China overlooked by scholars, is the role of the EU-China Legal Affairs Dialogue (LAD). Inaugurated in 2016, the high-level exchange appears to reflect a channel designed by the EU to *indirectly* promote human rights, along with rule of law (EEAS, 2016vii).

The dialogue emerged from long-running bilateral discussions to establish an EU-China dialogue connected to rule of law (See: Burnay et al., 2016). Irrespective of mutual interest in enhancing judicial cooperation, with the EU keen to increase legal certainty in all areas of bilateral cooperation and China interested in bolstering its judicial system, conflicting definitions of rule of law made the negotiations controversial (Burnay et al., 2016:98-99).

China rejects the EU's interpretation of the value which promotes an independent judiciary and conceptually links to liberal democracy and human rights. *Socialist rule of law with Chinese Characteristics* (See: State Council, 2011), instead displays markedly different standards which support China's one-party system (Burnay et al., 2016:97-101). These include no separation of power between the government and the judiciary, no supremacy of the law, as well as a lack of legal certainty and judicial independence (Burnay et al., 2016:100).⁴³

Reflecting this impasse, the EU proposed a "practical and technical rather than a conceptual approach" (Burnay et al., 2016:102) to the dialogue, which proved palatable to the Chinese side. Dialogues would instead focus on sharing experience and supporting China's transformation of its legal system, as opposed to being predicated upon reforming China's legal system in line with Western standards, as in the case of the human rights dialogue. This was reflected in the nomenclature of the dialogue: *legal affairs* as opposed to *rule of law* (Burnay et al., 2016:103).⁴⁴

⁴³ Within this context, Burnay et al. (2016:100) note how there is "no truly independent mechanism to interpret, enforce or review the Constitution and no possibility to invoke constitutional rights or have them protected".

⁴⁴ Interview with an official from DG JUST on 09.02.2017 at 10.30am, in Brussels

Crucially, despite this aesthetic concession, institutionally as well as conceptually, the EU still maintains a concrete connection between the LAD and bilateral human rights promotion. As in the case of the pre-dialogue negotiations, the EEAS's principal human rights desk in Brussels remains intimately involved with the dialogue.⁴⁵ The EEAS funds and coordinates the dialogue, with the support of DG Justice and Consumers (JUST).⁴⁶

Further empowering the channel as a means to promote human rights, the Chinese interlocutor is the State Council, one of the few China state institutions that *can* impact Chinese policy connected to the value.⁴⁷ Reflecting these attributes, the dialogue is (unofficially) framed by the EU side as an indirect, technical channel for promoting human rights with China.⁴⁸ As a result, this thesis will assess the extent to which the LAD is practically realising such a role, in the context of its case study focus on human rights.

People-to-People dialogue

It is also important to draw attention to the third pillar of the EU-China Strategic Partnership, People-to-People Dialogue (PPD), which has also largely been neglected by existing literature. Inaugurated in 2012, PPD primarily seeks to “contribute to the knowledge and common understanding between the EU and China through the enhancement of contacts between people of both sides” (EU Commission, 2012ii). As Burnay et al. (2014:50) note, PPD effectively reflects a response to the lack of understanding in EU-China relations described in this chapter - rooted in a disagreement over values - and its impact in limiting EU-China political relations.

To operationalise this objective, PPD seeks to facilitate exchanges between EU and Chinese civil society through (official-level) bilateral dialogues in the sectors of education, culture, youth and multilingualism, to increase mutual understanding (Burnay, et al, 2014:51; EU Commission, 2012ii; 2017ii; Reiterer, 2014:143-44). The focus of PPD in these sectors implies that the bilateral lack of understanding which informs it is also strongly rooted in weak intercultural knowledge and communication. This suggests that each side

⁴⁵ Interviews with an official from DG JUST on 09.02.2017 at 10.30am and diplomats from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am and 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

⁴⁶(*ibid.*)

⁴⁷ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

⁴⁸ Interviews with diplomats from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am and 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

may be engaging from a *default position* of ethnocentrism in EU-China dialogues which is negative for building common ground in controversial areas like values. Moreover, PPD's enabling of a *non-official* dimension of EU-China relations notably reflects an example of *horizontal power* in the partnership aimed at co-production to resolve differences, which can be distinguished from the exclusively official-official and top-down *vertical power* characterising the majority of EU-China dialogues and in turn, the bilateral relationship.⁴⁹

However, the sparse existing literature focusing on these sectors suggests that PPD is not yet functioning as envisioned due to a combination of limited bilateral funding and the Chinese side's top-down approach to the dialogues, wherein a reluctance to facilitate genuine bottom-up exchanges is worsening the challenges posed by a highly underdeveloped Chinese civil society (Burnay, et al, 2014:53; Fulda, 2013:4; 2015:278-279; Reiterer, 2014:152). In this sense, the role of horizontal power and its capacity to enhance EU-China relations, appears to be being constrained by vertical power on each side, leading to EU-China relations remaining overwhelmingly official-official in nature. This has meaningful implications for the practical implementation of the EU's normative power, as it means that the EU is almost solely engaging with Chinese officials strictly expressing the official party-state discourse on values, while limiting any input from individuals from Chinese civil society which may express more diverse positions, that could aid the establishment of normative common ground (*See also*, Chapter 5.5.2).

As a product of its holistic appraisal of the practical implementation of the EU's normative power in EU-China dialogues, this thesis will intrinsically incorporate and assess the dialogues encompassed by this interesting and under-researched (relatively new) pillar of EU-China relations.

3.7 The role of EU member states

Lastly, while this thesis focuses on the EU-level dialogues, much existing literature looks at the role of member states in EU-China relations. This offers important context to the mandates of EU-China dialogues and the background machinations informing them,

⁴⁹ Horizontal power can be captured by "political authority being transferred between the state and non-state actors" (Buchs, 2008:1), while vertical power relates to solely official-official transfers of power "upward or downward between differing levels of government".

particularly in terms of the extent to which the political centre of gravity pulls towards EU values or material interests.

Scholars describe how the EU's normative power with China has been weakened by disunity amongst member states, many of which have been hesitant about condemning China's contravention of EU values (particularly human rights) for fear of economic reprisal or missed Chinese trade and investment opportunities (Casarini, 2006:19; ECFR, 2015ii:86; 2016i) Mattlin, 2012:190). This tendency is argued to have been catalysed by domestic pressures for member states to regain economic stability and growth following the *Eurozone crisis* (Casarini, 2006:21; De Jonquieres, 2015:2).

As Casarini (2008:19-21) highlights, China has actively fuelled this disunity, skilfully linking political concessions to bilateral trade and attempting to "divide-and-rule" (Maher, 2016:976), including through high-profile vehicles such as 16+1 or the BRI (Fox and Godement, 2009:3; ECFR, 2016; Wood, 2011:253). Such dynamics have contributed to member states breaking ranks to join China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), their lobbying to end the EU's arms embargo and the EU's unconditional support of China's accession to the WTO (De Jonquieres, 2015:2; Balducci, 2008:18-19; ECFR, 2016:126; Mattlin, 2012:189, 194). A more recent example saw Greece vetoing the EU's UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) statement condemning China's human rights record after receiving significant Chinese investment (Reuters, 2017). This was the first time in history that the statement had not been delivered (*ibid.*).

Reflecting these themes in the literature, scholars can be seen to address the role of the Chinese side in impacting the EU's normative power through bilateral relations, in a fashion sorely lacking from research on EU-China dialogues. However, this is partly symptomatic of these dynamics being publicly observable (e.g. through the media and EU documents) through a macro-level approach, unlike the closed-door dialogues this thesis focuses upon.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of EU-China relations and associated literature. It was revealed that the EU-China partnership represents a highly transactional relationship, where the most successful areas of cooperation are based on mutual self-interest.

Reflecting this, economic cooperation dominates the relationship, while environmental and climate change cooperation has emerged as a standout area of political cooperation. This supports the argued status of the environmental dimension of sustainable development as the least controversial value in EU-China relations.

The comparatively underdeveloped nature of EU-China political relations, versus the economic relationship, was revealed to be rooted in a fundamental disagreement over values. Human rights was highlighted to reflect the most controversial and high profile example, supporting this thesis's focus on the value along with sustainable development.

Importantly, the chapter also addressed how the EU practically promotes its values in EU-China relations. It emerged that existing literature was highly critical of the EU's approach and impact, aligning with NPE literature in arguing that the EU's material interests are being prioritised in the bilateral relationship. However, like NPE literature, scholars appeared to narrowly focus on macro-level analysis of the EU constructive engagement strategy or the human rights dialogue specifically, while neglecting to provide insights into value mainstreaming in other EU-China dialogues. However, even in the context of the human rights dialogue, scholars still seemingly failed to provide insights into the micro-level dynamics of EU value promotion in practice. These include the role of individual EU officials and the impact of their Chinese counterparts and institutional mechanisms.

Additionally, literature to date appears have neglected to explore the possible distinction between value-promotion by Brussels-based and Beijing based officials, as well as the impact of cultural-linguistic skills amongst EU officials on value mainstreaming. Subsequent chapters will address this gap in existing NPE and EU-China literature.

Chapter 4 - Research Design

4.1 Introduction

This chapter defines this thesis's research strategy. It first details the project's underlying philosophical and theoretical positions, along with their relationship to the concept of normative power Europe (NPE) and the knowledge-gaps identified in Chapters 2 and 3 (Section 4.2). Thereafter, it presents this project's methodological choices and how they interact with the research question (Sections 4.3 and 4.4). These include the following *qualitative* methods: (1) the thesis's overarching approach, the *case study method*; (2) its principal tool of data collection, the *elite interview method* and (3) the thesis's approach to data analysis, *discourse analysis*.

4.2 Methodology

This thesis views epistemology and ontology as fixed perspectives held by researchers, impacting the topics they choose and the theory/methods used to engage with them (Braun and Clarke, 2013:31 Punch, 2014:14). On this level, the project reflects a *middle-ground* philosophy associated with *constructivist* approaches in International Relations (IR) (See: Jupille et al., 2003:14; Checkel, 1998:327; Manners, 2011:241; Parsons, 2010:90; Shen, 2011:24-26).

The research is ontologically constructivist in its privileging of the role of values in the EU's external relations more broadly and EU-China dialogues specifically. However, the project also displays *objectivism* through its acknowledgement of observable independent state/supranational structures (i.e. China and the EU) and the international system they occupy.

Epistemologically, the project's focus on the role of individual EU and Chinese officials and gaining their first-hand accounts is *interpretivist*, yet the research is *positivistic* in its desire to explain how values are practically promoted in EU-China relations. Crucially, as a product of this research's constructivist-interpretivist facet, there are numerous opportunities for bias. These surround the subjectivity of officials' accounts and the author's interpretation of them. This will be vigilantly mitigated during this thesis's data

collection and analysis through reflexivity and rigorous triangulation between interviewees' accounts and official documents (See sections 4.3.2 and 4.4).

Contrasting with other International Relations (IR) theories, arguably *IR constructivism* represents the most appropriate framework for this thesis. This is supported through a brief assessment of other key paradigms, which also serves to situate this thesis in the discipline of IR. Firstly, the dominant rationalist paradigms of *neorealism* and *neoliberalism* appear to lack applicability. Neorealism maintains that the international system is anarchic (i.e. no world government) and that the principle objective of state actors is *survival*, through the acquisition of power to balance against rivals (Copeland, 2012:54; Mearsheimer, 1994:10). According to neorealists, the best outcome in this environment is *order*. In contrast, neoliberalism maintains that *peace* is feasible in an anarchic system between dynamic states, through cooperative mechanisms, particularly those of economic independence, political institutionalism and democratic governance (Paul, 2012:13). For neoliberals, such mechanisms have been catalysed by globalisation and its blurring of borders, information and capital (Baldwin, 1993:5-6).

At a basic level, the state-centrism of these paradigms makes them unable to capture the role of the EU as an independent international actor. While neorealism struggles to explain the existence of the EU as a product of interstate cooperation, let alone its independent actorness in world politics, neoliberalism's capacity to theorise European integration remains limited to a focus on its member states (Rosamond, 2000:132-133, 135). Additionally, these theories view states as abstract actors at the macro-level, while neglecting the role of individual policymakers/officials at the micro-level addressed by this thesis.⁵⁰ More fundamentally however, even when these paradigms are developed to theorise the EU as an international actor, akin to the *counter-conceptualisations* of NPE described in Chapter 2.4, analysis remains limited to the role of *material power* in world politics. Conversely, ideational forces and their influence on individual policymakers are considered to have little impact on the behaviour of international actors by these paradigms (McDonald, 2013:64). The role of the EU's values and their relationship with its

⁵⁰ It is worth highlighting that these neorealism and neoliberalism have been further developed to explain the origin of state preferences. For example, neoclassical realism focuses on the relationship between states' societies and political elites, which impact how states interpret and respond to the "murky and difficult to read" anarchic international arena (Elman and Jensen, 2013:26). Similarly, neoliberalism has been expanded to explain the role of domestic politics in European integration (See: Rosamond, 2000:135). In both cases however, the micro-level role of individual policymakers/officials is still neglected.

material interests in EU-China relations are central to this thesis, its middle ground philosophy and its conceptual basis of NPE. In this context, it is important to reiterate that Manners developed NPE in order to depart from these limited rationalist paradigms, their state-centrism and their neglect of ideational forces in the post-cold war period, to theorise the EU's normative power (See Chapter 2.2).

Beyond *neorealism and neoliberalism*, other more specialist IR theories also arguably fall short in their scope to capture the practical promotion of the EU's normative power in EU-China dialogues. For example, Marxist theories narrowly explain the exploitation of developing countries by those that are more developed, while again being state-centric and focused on material power (Maguire, 2010:143-144). The latter is cast as being monopolised by the developed countries to create dependency relationships and engender interstate conflict (*ibid.*). While ideational forces play a role in Marxist theories, they are limited to those which support and normalise these conflict relations (*ibid.* p. 145). Similarly, feminist IR theories focus specifically on revealing and critiquing "gendered assumptions and representations" (Whitworth, 2013:109) in world politics and their role in existing academic approaches. Although feminist theories depart from state-centrism in their focus on "(gender-differentiated) people" (*ibid.*, p. 110), this specificity means that they lack the scope to effectively theorise the practical role and significance of values in EU-China dialogues.

On the contrary, IR constructivism strongly aligns with this thesis's topic, middle ground philosophy and the conceptual basis of NPE, capturing the role of ideational forces in world politics (Manners, 2006i:169; Shen, 2011:23). In this fashion, the paradigm incorporates the role of material structures into its analysis of a *socially constructed* reality, based on the premise that social actors, through interaction with these structures, ascribe meaning to them (Checkel, 1998:325; Jupille et al., 2003:14; Parsons, 2010:89, 90). Importantly, this relationship between structure and agency is cast as dynamic and multidirectional, as they shape one another to impact social action (*ibid.*). In this sense, the paradigm considers world politics to have both social and material dimensions which mutually constitute the behaviour of international actors (Jupille et al., 2003:14; Checkel, 1998:326).

Notably, *values* are argued to hold special significance as a social force by constructivists being considered to inform how international actors behave (Checkel and Moravcsik,

2001:220; Jupille et al., 2003:14-15). Significantly, these values shared by actors are considered to be dynamic and alterable via extraneous normative influences (*ibid.*). This captures value promotion from one actor to another, such as that between the EU and China through EU-China dialogues.

Reflecting this privileging of values in world politics and their capacity to transform the preferences of international actors, IR constructivism represents the theoretical foundation of NPE and in turn, this thesis (Diez, 2005:635; Youngs, 2004:415; Whitman, 2013:173). Manners (2006i:169) applies and expands IR constructivist approaches to theorise the EU's international role as a normative power. NPE reflects a particularly influential contribution to the European studies sub-field of IR, which has been increasingly dominated by the constructivist perspective (*ibid.*).

4.3 Research Methods

4.3.1 The case study method

The most suitable way to approach the research question "how is the EU operationalising its normative power in EU-China relations in practice?" is the case study method. This is because answering the question requires significant depth and detail. The case study method is ideal for this as it facilitates in-depth investigation of a limited number of cases, through a plurality of data sources, as a means of understanding a broader "contemporary phenomenon" (Noor, 2008:1602; *See also*: Tellis, 1997:1; Yin, 2003:13; 2012:4).

The close examination enshrined by the method is also considered to make it a proficient tool for understanding "complex" (Yin, 2003:2) interactions in the social world (*See also*: Noor, 2008:1602-1602). Reflecting these attributes, the case study method is thus well-suited for this thesis's nuanced, micro-level approach to the research question. This encompasses a focus on individual EU officials mainstreaming values with China and the impact of institutional mechanisms and their counterparts on such activities.

To exploit the capacity for depth offered by the case study method, this thesis concentrates on a single case: EU-China relations. Single case studies allow researchers to focus exclusively and intensively on an individual unit of analysis, capturing nuances

largely unobtainable in multi-case analysis (Bennett and Elman, 2007:178; Gerring, 2004:348; 2007:1; Yin, 2003:39-40; 2012:18). As little is known in existing scholarship about how EU officials practically operationalise the EU's normative power in dialogues with third countries, a single case provides the greatest scope for nuance and explanatory power.

The case study method importantly provides rigorous *case selection criteria*, which made it possible to identify and justify China as a *single case* for exploring the operationalisation of the EU's normative power in practice (Bennet and Elman, 2007:172; Seawright and Gerring, 2008:294). In this context, China reflects arguably a single "crucial case" capable of expanding and refining a theory (in this instance NPE) (Bennett and Elman, 2006:462; Lijphart, 1971:692; Yin, 2003:40). This derives from the EU-China partnership displaying the greatest tension between EU material interests and mutual understanding on values in the EU's external relations. As Shen (2011:11) highlights, it represents the most challenging case for the EU's normative power in practice.

Conversely, it is important to acknowledge that the depth offered by single cases comes at the price of the representativeness and capacity for generalization provided by multi-case studies (*ibid.*). However, these limitations can be countered through the inclusion of *within case* variations. These provide the opportunity for further rich analysis "that only serves to better illuminate the case" (Baxter and Jack, 2008:548). To this end, this thesis focuses particularly on how EU officials practically mainstream the values of human rights and the environmental dimension of sustainable development in EU-China dialogues. These values were selected on the basis that they reflect the *most* and *least* controversial values in EU-China relations, effectively, two extreme cases for enquiry (Seawright and Gerring, 2008:294).

This specific focus, in conjunction with a broad appraisal of EU value mainstreaming with China, allows for a comprehensive assessment of the EU's normative power with China in practice. Additionally, the pursuit of a non-controversial EU value - the environmental dimension of sustainable development - also aids safe and productive data collection in China. A focus on sustainable development reduces the potential of misunderstanding and enhances the potential of getting access to Chinese officials, who will feasibly discuss this area. As noted in Chapter 3, many of the EU's values are of great political sensitivity

to the Chinese side, particularly human rights, and there is decreasing tolerance for any political dissent in China, even by foreigners.

4.3.2 The elite interview method

Attributes

The *elite interview method* reflects this thesis's chosen tool for data collection. This is justified on the basis that the method is specially designed for accessing and interviewing *elites*, powerful individuals that directly impact upon political outcomes, such as the EU officials engaging in EU-China dialogues (Delaney, 2007:208; Richards, 1996:199; Stephens, 2007:205). Moreover, elite interviews also allow researchers to expand upon existing academic literature and policy documents through collecting first-hand accounts from practitioners that are actively shaping a topic of interest (Goldstein, 2006:669; Pierce, 2008:119; Stephens, 2007:205). This makes it well-suited for this thesis's focus on value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues, where there is a significant knowledge-gap.

While this area is neglected in existing scholarship, there is also a lack of insight into the practical micro-dynamics of EU-China dialogues in publicly available official EU and Chinese documents. This reflects a strong motivation for this thesis's pursuit of the elite interview method, as well as its overarching approach to the research question. Beyond this, the method importantly also makes it possible for researchers to multiply their interviews through exploiting participants' inter-institutional networks (Goldstein, 2002:671; Harrison, 2001:94; Richardson, 2014:182).

On the flipside, the method can be problematic to implement. Gaining access to busy elites can be very challenging and this can foster small and unrepresentative samples (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002:673; Goldstein, 2002:669-670; Richardson, 2014:182). However, in the context of this thesis, the individuals operationalising EU-China dialogues work in very small groups, with often a single individual principally managing dialogues connected to a given policy sector (See Chapter 5.4). As a result, the 41 interviews with EU officials carried out for this project, supported by a further 8 contextual accounts (described below) reflect arguably a highly comprehensive and meaningful sample.

Another principal challenge facing researchers pertains to how interviewees can assert their power and authority to control the direction and content of interviews, or deliberately misrepresent events and spread disinformation for their own ends (McEvoy, 2006:185; Morris, 2009:211, 213; Richards, 1996:201). Following the recommendations of elite interview literature, this thesis mitigated this issue through triangulating the substance in interviewee's accounts with their colleagues and where possible EU, Chinese and joint official documents. These documents were publicly available on the websites for EU and Chinese institutions involved with EU-China dialogues. This thesis acknowledges that as a product of this, these documents often had multiple intended audiences i.e. the domestic public for legitimacy, messages to the other side (i.e. the EU or China) and internal working guidelines. Analysis was pursued critically on this basis.

The selected documents included key texts from EU-China relations such as the latest joint strategy, each side's strategies on EU-China relations, the joint statements following the annual high-level summits and the guiding policy documents and bilateral press releases framing each policy sector encompassed by the interview sample. To compensate for the comparative lack of English language and public documents from the Chinese side, some key Chinese speeches on EU-China relations were also included for analysis.

As this thesis is seeking to explore the micro-level dynamics surrounding the background coordination and implementation of EU values during dialogues - which are closed to the public - the official documents described above tend to offer limited insights into their design and operationalisation. In this respect, the most pertinent insight from these resources relates to provision of the broad topics/objectives of each policy sector, which specifies or presents possible normative dimensions of dialogues. This provides an idea of how EU values could/should feature in dialogues. In rare cases, the minutes of dialogues are made available, but these documents tend to also be very limited; providing only a broad overview of the topics being discussed and often omitting any controversial/sensitive discussions due to these documents being public and typically subject to bilateral approval.

Beyond this triangulating function, the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) and thematic documents on human rights and sustainable development were also selected to crucially establish the EU's official discourse on value mainstreaming (*See Chapter 6.2*). This discourse

reflects the mainstreaming standards that EU officials are constitutionally prescribed to follow in their dialogues with third countries. Through establishing these standards and their alignment with the ideal-type of NPE, this thesis is able to tangibly assess the extent to which the EU's normative power is being operationalised in EU-China dialogues in practice.

Operationalising elite interviews: Sampling and delivery

In terms of operationalising the elite interview method, the first step involved sampling and accessing participants. Using the *snowball sampling technique* (See: Richardson, 2014:182; Tansey, 2007:18), which allows researchers to exploit interviewees' personal networks to increase sample sizes, this project principally sought to secure as many interviews as possible with EU officials from the two EU institutions responsible for coordinating and implementing EU-China dialogues: the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Within this context, the project aimed to encompass key policy sectors of EU-China relations, spanning all three pillars of the strategic partnership, including officials based in both Brussels and at the EU delegation to China in Beijing.

The large scale and multifaceted nature of EU-China relations necessitated this thesis focusing on the area of greatest pertinence to the practical implementation of the EU's normative power. This thesis focused specifically on the EU-level dialogues with China on the following basis. Firstly, NPE conceptualises the EU as an international actor, distinct from its member states and these dialogues reflect the primary forums of the EU-level bilateral relationship.

Secondly, a focus on EU-China dialogues and the EEAS and Commission officials operationalising them, is also arguably justified on the basis that the mandates of these exchanges have been *pre-agreed* by EU member states and the European Parliament. Through this assumption, this thesis can pursue a detailed assessment of the practical implementation of the EU's normative power in EU-China dialogues and omit the background agenda-setting of the EU's external action. As described in Chapter 5, EEAS and Commission officials have significant autonomy in planning EU-China dialogues and their substance.

Beyond this central sample, this thesis has also sought to secure additional pertinent perspectives from other EU institutions, member states, NGOs and in particular, the Chinese side. These interviews, like the policy documents can be triangulated with the accounts from Commission/EEAS officials, providing additional context and crucially, include Chinese perspectives (where possible). Views from the Chinese side tend to be absent from existing literature.

However, it is important to emphasise the difficulty of gaining access to Chinese officials. Open access to the Chinese government by civil society is not an institutionalised feature of China's closed authoritarian system, being challenging even for Chinese nationals, let alone foreigners. Unlike the EU's institutions, there is also no direct contact details for specific parts of Chinese institutions, beyond generic online contact forms or central phone numbers.

Based on the strategy outlined above, this project secured 49 interviews; 42 accrued in three extended blocks throughout 2017, one in 2018 and six from a pilot study conducted in 2015. Breaking this down, 41 interviews were with EU officials. Their institutions/departments are displayed in Table 4.1, while Figure 4.1 displays how this sample encompasses a comprehensive number of dialogues from the EU-China Strategic Partnership. On top this, the author interviewed individuals from two EU member states (large and small), three NGO's and three officials from the Chinese side (*See Table 4.2*).

In keeping with the difficulties in accessing Chinese officials, interviews with the Chinese side were secured solely through snowball sampling, being based on Beijing interviewees' own personal networks. These interviews would not have been obtainable through other means and on several occasions, EU officials' Chinese counterparts rejected interview access, despite the existence of these personal networks.

The interviews were also supplemented by *participant observation* at two internal EU events - one EU-China dialogue connected to social policy and an internal EU event featuring civil society and EU officials debating the future of another very high-profile dialogue. Participant observation involves:

The active engagement of the researcher with the members of the community that he or she wishes to study, typically as an equal member of the group (Fine, 2015:530).

The method provides the opportunity to witness social action and gather “rich and detailed data” (*ibid.*). This again aligns with this thesis’s nuanced approach to the research question, which seeks to illuminate the little-known dynamics of value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues. Through attending these events, particularly the EU-China dialogue, the author was able to observe the behaviour of the EU and Chinese sides. This provided valuable insights and context for EU value mainstreaming in practice, at the micro-level. The inherent subjectivity of these observations was countered through triangulation with interviews and policy documents (*ibid.*). A full list of the interviews conducted for this thesis and their dates/locations can be found in Appendix i.

Table 4.1 Sample breakdown: EU interviews

EU institution	Directorate General (DG)/EEAS Directorate/Delegation section	Location
European Commission	DG Climate Action (CLIMA)	Brussels
	DG Communications Networks, Content and Technology (CONNECT)	Brussels
	DG Development Cooperation (DEVCO)	Brussels
	DG Environment (ENV)	Brussels
	DG Energy (ENER)	Brussels
	DG Economic and Financial Affairs (ECFIN)	Brussels
	DG Education and Culture (EAC)	Brussels
	DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (GROW)	Brussels
	DG Justice and Consumers (JUST)	Brussels
	DG Migration and Home Affairs (HOME)	Brussels
	DG Mobility and Transport (MOVE)	Brussels
	DG Research and Innovation (RTD)	Brussels
	DG Trade (TRADE)	Brussels
	Trade and Investment Section, EU delegation to China	Beijing
	Economic and Finance Section, EU delegation to China	Beijing
	Information Society Media Section, EU delegation to China	Beijing
	Science, Technology and Environment Section, EU delegation to China	Beijing
European External Action Service (EEAS)	ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate	Brussels
	Office of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights	Brussels
	GLOBAL Directorate	Brussels
	Political Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China	Beijing
Council of the European Union	DG Foreign Affairs	Brussels

Figure 4.1 EU-China dialogues captured by sample (EEAS, 2017i)

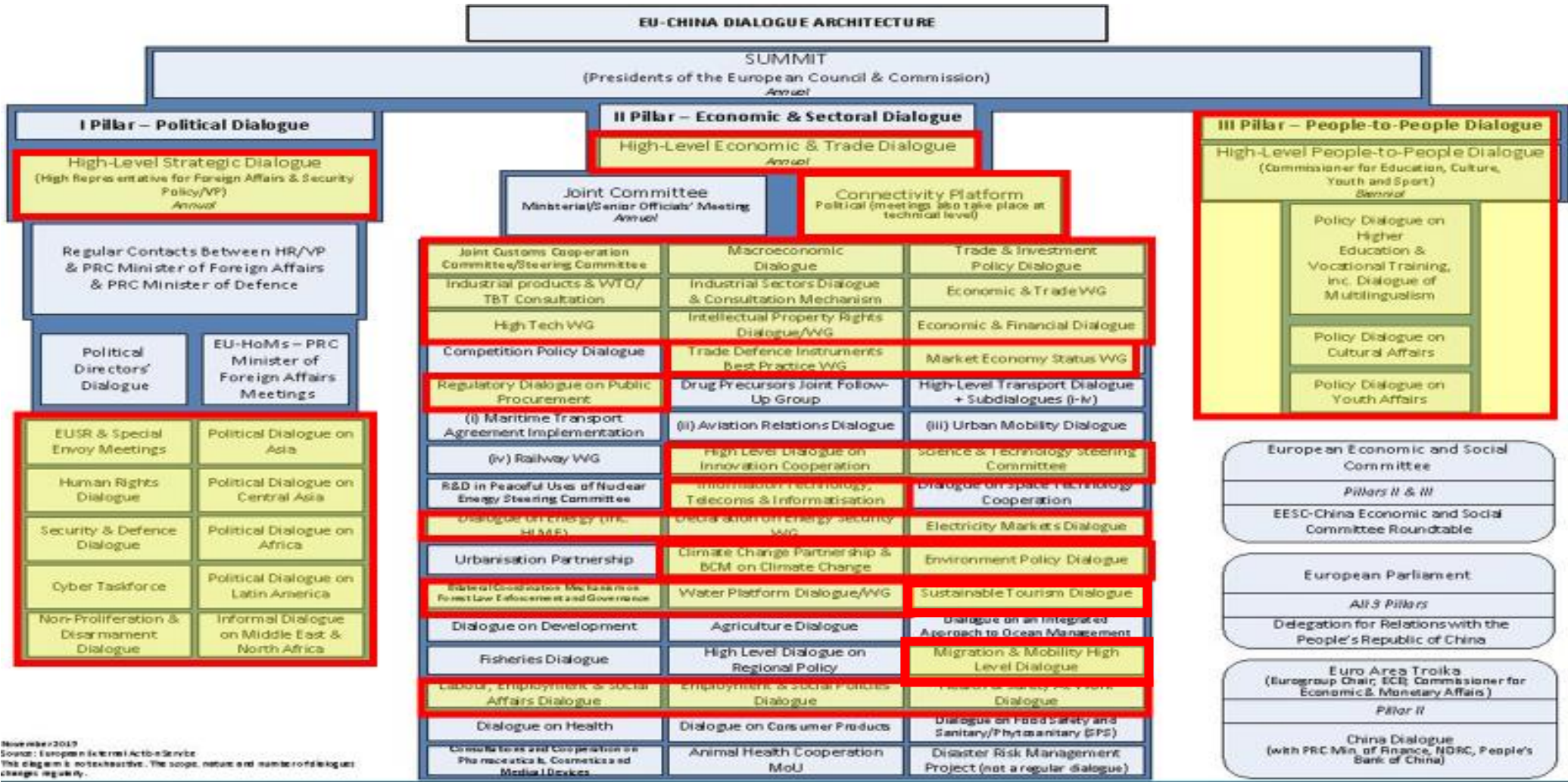


Table 4.2 Sample breakdown: Interviews with EU member states, NGOs and the Chinese side

EU member state/Chinese institution [PRC]/NGO	Department	Location
Republic of Ireland	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Beijing
United Kingdom	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Embassy	Beijing
Client Earth	N/A	Beijing
World Resources Institute	N/A	Beijing
European Chamber of Commerce in China (EU)	N/A	Beijing
State Council [PRC]	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	Beijing
State Council [PRC]	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	Beijing
Ministry of Environmental Protection [PRC]	N/A	Beijing

The interviews were conducted on the basis of informed consent. In advance of interviews, participants were provided with a document clearly articulating the research project, its objectives, the option for interviewees to withdraw at any time without explanation and crucially, a guarantee of strict anonymity (i.e. interviews were non-attributable). This document had to be signed by participants in advance of interviews. Anonymity aided access to interviewees and maximised their openness during interviews and thus data quality.

Interviews tended to last around 1hr 15mins on average and followed the best practice outlined by relevant literature. Interviews consisted of a semi-structured format with around 10 key questions and a number of sub-questions, which would flexibly alter in delivery depending on the flow of the conversation with the interviewee (Beamer, 2002:92; Richards, 1996:202). The questions largely focused on the extent to which the EU's values, both more broadly and in the specific cases of human rights and sustainable development, were being *practically* mainstreamed into EU-China dialogues; internal mechanisms for value mainstreaming; the conduct of the Chinese side in dialogues and; the role/importance of cultural and linguistic knowledge in EU-China dialogues.

The questions were designed to be non-leading and mitigate the subjective biases of the author, such as their personal views on EU and Chinese positions on values. This thesis also acknowledged that interviewees may interpret concepts such *value mainstreaming*, *human rights* and *sustainable development* differently from the author. In effect, there was a danger that the interviewer and the interviewee were talking about different things. To mitigate this, the author explained the research project and its objectives at the beginning of interviews in detail. Moreover, this thesis's incorporation and analysis of policy documents, including those aimed at providing internal working guidelines, contributed to a synthesis between how this project interpreted these concepts and the EU's internal definitions/understandings. The author also remained highly attentive during interviews to ensure that interviewees were engaging with and interpreting concepts in the manner intended by questions.

Where possible, interviews were audio-recorded to maximise data richness and accurate recall, though this was dependent on the permission of the interviewee (Beamer, 2002:92; Peabody et al., 1990:454). In practice, 30/49 interviews were audio-recorded, with permission far less common in Beijing than in Brussels, reflective of local security concerns. The remaining interviews were recorded with written-notes in real-time (including direct-quotations where pertinent) and immediately transcribed in full as soon as possible after interviews. In all cases, to ensure anonymity, officials' names were redacted from transcripts. In some cases, this extended to redacting interviewees' departments (or directorates) due to the potential of identification, considering the very small groups of people working in EU-China dialogues.

Overall, the elite interview method reflects an ideal tool for answering the research question. The method makes it possible to access and interview EU officials operationalising EU-China dialogues and thus assess the practical implementation of the EU's normative power at the micro-level, neglected by existing literature.

4.4 Data analysis

Discourse analysis

To fully exploit the data-richness garnered from the elite interview method, this project used discourse analysis. It reflects an analytical technique which focuses on the underlying meaning and patterns located in language, which inform shared social backgrounds or *discourses* which impact social action (Fairclough, 2003:5; Vroman, 2002:264). The method thus has the capacity to make deeper observations about interview transcripts and policy documents than comparable methods, such as content or thematic analysis, which solely consider literal meaning (Fierke, 2009:84; Potter, 2004:612, 613).

Discourse analysis derives from *poststructuralist approaches*, which are closely associated with the works of Michel Foucault and claims that language is *constitutive* of social reality, meaning that prevailing linguistic categories (i.e. discourses) are considered to determine or *produce* social action, identities and material structures (Antaki, 2009:434; Hansen, 2006:17, 173; Potter, 2004:607, 610). In this sense, poststructuralist approaches typically reject the existence of independent material structures, instead viewing the social and material worlds as similarly constituted by language (Hansen, 2006:22). *Discourses* are also importantly considered to be non-static/changeable, while texts are often viewed to play a central role in their articulation (Hansen, 2006:20-21, 174-175).

However, discourse analysis represents a highly fragmented area of social science (Bryman, 2012:528, 540; Potter, 2004:607, 608). There is a plethora of variations as opposed to a universal mode of practice (*ibid.*). In the discipline of IR, scholars' use of discourse analysis most closely resembles that of *critical discourse analysis* (CDA), which departs from poststructuralist approaches in its recognition of objective material structures, yet still recognises the power of discourses and the central role of texts (Hansen, 2006:xviii; Millken, 1999:225; Vroman, 2002:264; Wodak, 2004:185).⁵¹

In this setting, IR scholars pertinently maintain that discourses determine the ideas and practices of individuals that speak/act on behalf of material structures like international

⁵¹ CDA scholars maintain that discourses have the potential to (and should) transform material structures, based on critical Marxist ideological foundations (Bryman, 2012:538; Fairclough, 2003:8; Fairclough and Wodak, 2004:357). Reflecting this, it is important to highlight that CDA has a strong *critical* facet which is less prominent in IR studies.

actors (Larsen, 2004:62; Milliken, 1999:229). Consequently, discourses can be seen to have a deterministic impact on how EU officials practically implement (or mainstream) EU values with China in EU-China dialogues. Moreover, the method can illuminate the official discourse on value mainstreaming found in EU policy documents and the extent to which the standards it prescribes align with NPE.

Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting that a discourse analysis approach is largely absent from existing NPE and EU-China literature (See: Diez, 2005:615). This arguably connects again to existing literature neglecting the micro-level of the EU's normative power, including the role of individual EU officials mainstreaming EU values. It is this level of analysis, focused on by this thesis, wherein discourse analysis is arguably most appropriate and effective at maximising analytical inference.

Additionally, it is important to highlight that like IR proponents, this project adopts discourse analysis as an *instrumental tool*. It seeks to deeply examine the consistency of the ideational influences privileged by constructivist approaches, without importing discourse analysis's traditional poststructuralist ideas (Larsen, 2004:63).⁵² On this basis, the project uses discourse analysis to analyse both transcripts of interviewees' accounts and key policy documents.

Employing discourse analysis

There is no single, agreed technique for employing the discourse analysis in existing literature. This thesis's use of the method was principally based upon the techniques outlined by Jennifer Milliken (1998), a widely cited schematic for employing the method in IR.

The first step consisted of a close reading of the (anonymised) interview transcripts and policy documents, encompassing a careful observation of their "content, structure and meaning" (Bryman, 2012:538; See also: Barnutz, 2011:90). Thereafter, the discourses (both official and those expressed by interviewees) were identified through a process of

⁵² While constructivism and poststructuralism share an ideational focus, IR constructivism, the foundation of NPE, views reality as mutually constituted by social and material influences, acknowledging the role of external systemic pressures on international actors. Conversely, poststructuralism rejects the social/material separation, asserting that both dimensions are constituted by language (See: Hansen, 2006:17, 171).

“analysis and abstraction”, which sought to “draw out... a general structure of relational distinctions and hierarchies” (Milliken, 1999:231). While there are multiple techniques for identifying discourses, this project adopted *predicate analysis*, which focuses on how nouns (e.g. China or the EU) are being constructed (predicated) by the “verbs, adverbs and adjectives” (Milliken, 1999:232) attached to them. As Milliken (1999:232-233) describes, through this technique, it is possible to observe the characteristics and roles being assigned to actors in each text.

Predicate analysis was facilitated through a rigorous computer-assisted *coding* process, using NVivo software (Barnutz, 2011:93; Braun and Clarke, 2006:88-89). Through the steps outlined above, discourses in the interview transcripts and policy documents were identified and coded into categories, with the key discourses emerging through their prevalence across interviewees’ accounts. Notably, this process was undertaken according to a *grounded theory* logic, which sought to mitigate the preconceptions/bias of the researcher and let the data *speak for itself* (See: Antaki, 2009:436; Fierke, 2007:85; Milliken, 1999:234).

More broadly, the author’s subjective biases were also countered through reflexively approaching interviewees’ accounts and being vigilant for potential alternative interpretations of their language. This crucially ensured that the author’s interpretation was what the interviewee intended.

Following the identification of the discourses across the transcripts and policy documents, the final step of the process consisted of establishing how they impacted *reality* i.e. *the practical implementation of the EU’s normative power* with China (Milliken, 1999:236, 242; See also: Fairclough, 2003:17; Vromen, 2010:264). More specifically, this step consisted of reflexivity about how the discourses were practically informing value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues, including the approaches of EU officials and the reactions by their Chinese counterparts. This process also extended to what Milliken (1999:242) describes as *play of practice*. The concept refers to researchers capturing the dynamic nature of discourses in practice, particularly through reflecting upon how they are being *reproduced* in practice. In this sense, the project sought to identify whether certain EU individuals/institutions or official documents were serving to reproduce the discourses shared by EU officials.

Relatedly, the analysis also sought to contrast the key assumptions/perceptions of discourses, particularly those from the official discourse found in documents versus discourses expressed by interviewees. This is captured by what Milliken (1999:243) describes as the *juxtapositional method*, which seeks to juxtapose the truths expressed by discourses with the issues/events they fail to acknowledge. In other words, discerning how discourses are engaging with reality. Ultimately, as Milliken (1999:242) notes, reflexivity about how discourses are constituted, maintained and interact with one another is a hallmark of effective discourse analysis.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter set out the research design for this thesis to answer the research question and address knowledge gaps in existing NPE and EU-China literature. The chapter first described this project's methodology, including its middle-ground philosophical position and the IR approach of constructivism, which reflects the foundation of NPE, the conceptual basis of this thesis.

Secondly, the chapter detailed the qualitative research methods adopted by this thesis. The case study method was illustrated to primarily frame the project, being used to select and justify China as a single case study for assessing the practical implementation of the EU's normative power. It also underpins this thesis's focus on human rights and the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Building on this, the elite interview method was justified as the most appropriate method for data collection due to its capacity to access and elicit in-depth accounts from officials involved in EU-China dialogues. The chapter importantly detailed this thesis's operationalisation of the method including aspects like the interview sample and the official documents used for triangulation. Lastly, the chapter introduced discourse analysis, justifying its applicability on the basis that it could maximise the data-richness of interviews and most effectively assess the practical implementation of the EU's normative power at the micro-level focused on by this thesis.

Chapter 5 - EU-China dialogues and interinstitutional relationships

5.1 Introduction

Before outlining the research findings, it is important to provide context for the reader into how EU-China dialogues function in practice and the responsibilities of the EU institutions operationalising them to promote or *mainstream* EU values. This chapter will first introduce the two EU institutions responsible for EU-China dialogues – the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) - and their constitutional-legal relationship, regarding value mainstreaming in the EU's external relations (Sections 5.2.-5.3). Thereafter the chapter will describe the individuals/structures of these institutions responsible for EU-China dialogues (Section 5.4). Finally, the chapter will outline the characteristics and format of EU-China dialogues and the significance of this for value mainstreaming (Sections 5.5-5.6).

5.2 EU Institutional roles and responsibilities for EU-China dialogues

The two EU institutions responsible for operationalising EU-China dialogues are the European Commission and the EEAS. The Commission represents the EU's executive which proposes EU laws/policies and manages their implementation through an extensive departmental civil service – the Commission Directorate Generals or DGs (EU, 2018i). While the DG's largely have an internal focus, they importantly maintain responsibility for planning and implementing the dimensions of the EU's external action relevant to their policy sector or wholly in the cases of trade, enlargement, development and humanitarian aid (EU Council, 2010:1; EEAS, 2018iii).

Conversely, the EEAS, created with the 2009 Lisbon Treaty (operationalised in 2011), reflects an independent EU foreign service, responsible for coordinating and implementing the EU's foreign and security policy, to make the EU's external action "more consistent and visible" (EU Council, 2010:1-3; *See also*: Piris, 2010:250, 255). Pre-Lisbon, these responsibilities were mandated to the Council of the European Union's DG E and the Commission's DG External relations (DG RELEX), both entities of which were absorbed into this new institution (*ibid.*).

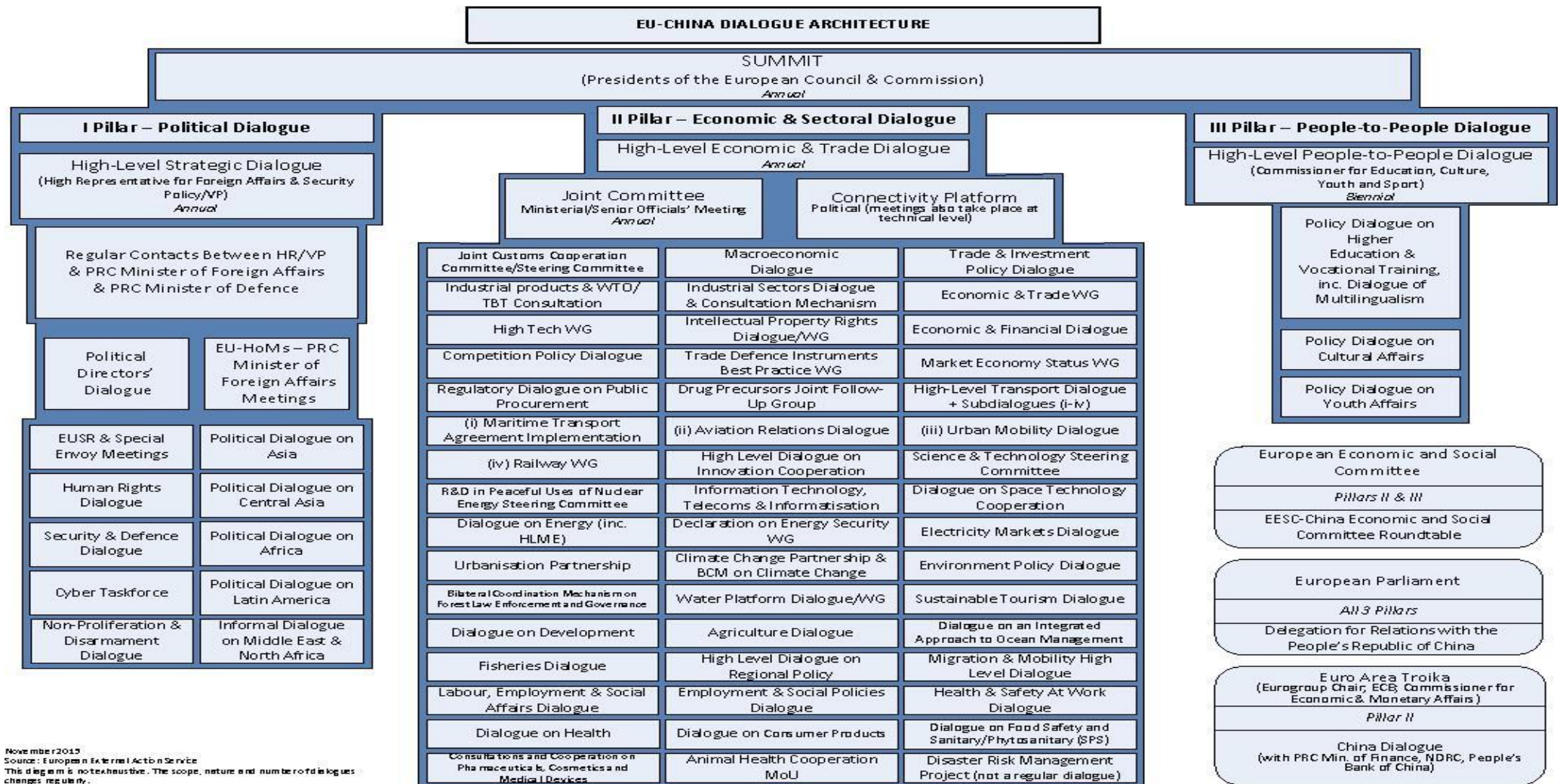
The EEAS is headed by a specially created *double-hatted* post, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) (Council, 2010:1-3; Piris, 2010:250, 255). Through the inclusion of a senior role in the Commission, the post is designed to ensure that the EEAS has the capacity to coordinate *all* aspects of external action at the EU-level (EEAS, 2018iv).

Notably, the institution also includes temporary seconded diplomats from member states' foreign services, which must occupy at least 33%, but no more than 40% of the staff (Council, 2010:1, 10-11; EEAS, 2015; 2018i; 2018ii). The incorporation of member states' diplomats was part of a broader effort to facilitate a close working relationship between the member states foreign/defence ministries and this EU-level institution, which is also reflected in the HR/VPs additional role as President of the Foreign Affairs Council (EEAS, 2018ii).⁵³

These interinstitutional connections are designed to ensure the power and legitimacy of the EU's external action, the mandate of which is dependent upon a consensus amongst the member states. Reflecting the above institutional responsibilities, in EU-China relations, the Commission DGs implement the diverse policy sectors encompassed by pillars 2 and 3 of the Strategic Partnership, while the EEAS implements the pillar 1 political dialogues and coordinates all other dialogues (See Fig. 5.1 below).

⁵³ The Foreign Affairs Council formation brings together member states' foreign ministers, as part of the HR/VP's broader consensus-building role amongst the member states (EU Council, 2010: EEAS, 2018i).

Figure 5.1 EU-China dialogue architecture (EEAS, 2017i)



5.3 Attributing interinstitutional responsibility for EU value mainstreaming with China

Due to their responsibility for operationalising EU-China dialogues, the two institutions are also de-facto responsible for promoting EU-China values through these diverse exchanges. However, while this reflects a collective responsibility, it is important to establish the extent to which the EEAS, as part of its overarching coordinating role, can *enforce* such mainstreaming activities on their Commission colleagues.

This relationship is clarified by the *Council decision establishing the organisation and functioning of the EEAS* (Council, 2010:1). The document explicitly describes how the EEAS is limited to assisting the HR/VP in their capacity as Vice-President of the Commission through coordinating the EU's external action (to aid coherency/effectiveness) "without prejudice to the normal tasks of the Commission services" (Council, 2010:1; *See also*: 2010:7). In this sense, beyond foreign and security policy (i.e. pillar 1 EU-China dialogues), which is exclusively under EEAS management, the interinstitutional working relationship is established as one of "cooperation" (Council, 2010:3) between two autonomous institutions. The relationship is two-way and consultative, as opposed to the Commission DGs having any legal onus to enact the will of the EEAS (Council, 2010:3; Piris, 2010:248). Similarly, at the highest levels, the HR/VP does not have "the legal power to impose his/her decisions on his/her colleagues in the college" (Piris, 2010:248).

Consequently, in the context of value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues, the EEAS can merely promote such activities, as opposed to having the constitutional authority to legally enforce them on their Commission colleagues. However, both institutions *are* legally bound to the higher power enshrined by the Lisbon Treaty and its supporting (thematic/sectoral) documents, which establishes the official discourse and requisite standards on value mainstreaming with third countries (*See Chapter 6.2*).

5.4 Individuals and structures responsible for EU-China dialogues

The European Commission

To contextualise the empirical chapters, it is important to explain the individuals/structures in the Commission and the EEAS responsible for operationalising EU-China dialogues. In both institutions, very small groups of individuals plan and conduct the dialogues. Regarding the Commission, as most Directorate-Generals or DGs principally have an internal EU focus, they tend to have a single *unit* responsible for addressing the external dimensions of their policy sector (See example in Fig. 5.2). Using the EU's official online directory (See EU, 2018ii), analysis of these units attached to the Commission DGs covered by this project, suggests that they contain 16 individuals on average,⁵⁴ including 2-4 administrative staff.

In this context, typically only a single official will have responsibility for China, internally known as *the China desk*.⁵⁵ However, in many DGs, this China portfolio will also reflect part of a broader regional or even global portfolio.⁵⁶ These individuals have the primary responsibility for coordinating and negotiating the topics or *themes* of their dialogue(s) with the Chinese side (See Section 5.6), working closely with their parallel desk at the EU delegation to China in Beijing.⁵⁷

The analysis above excludes the DGs which are externally focused and have greater independence vis-à-vis the EEAS, of which this project encompasses two: DG Trade and DG International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO). The former, focused on the EU's international trade relations, had at the time of writing, a 13 strong Unit dedicated to East Asia in Brussels, which included 5 officials focusing on China (EU, 2018iii).

Notwithstanding this DG's external focus, this team is unusually large. This is attributable to the scale and significance of EU-China economic relations, as described in Chapter 3.3.

With regard to DG DEVCO, which coordinates the EU's international development aid, the DG similarly hosts a regional unit dedicated to East and South Asian countries (EU,

⁵⁴ Based on calculated mean of personnel from international cooperation units encompassed by the thesis's interview sample.

⁵⁵ Interviews with officials from DG EAC on 17.06.2015 at 5.00pm and 24.02.2017 at 3.00pm in Brussels; Interviews with an official from DG ENV on 08.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels; and an official from the European Commission on 23.05.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Interview with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

2018iv). However, as noted in Chapter 2.3.3, China is no longer considered a developing country as of 2017, so China-country capacity has been significantly drawn down in this DG during the period of this research project. As a result, DG DEVCO capacity on EU-China relations is now comparable to other DGs (i.e. a single individual given responsibility) and development cooperation is moving towards a donor-donor coordination format (managed by the EEAS) as opposed to donor-recipient.⁵⁸ That being said, it is important to highlight the continued involvement in EU-China relations by individuals from DG DEVCO working with autonomous human rights funding instruments, principally the European Instrument for Democracy and Human rights (EIDHR) (See: EU Commission, 2018iv).

Additionally, it is essential to highlight that beyond the China desk(s) dedicated to EU-China relations in most DGs,⁵⁹ other officials from throughout each DG, with thematic portfolios - issue-specific as opposed to country-specific - will also partake in dialogues depending on the theme. For example, the EU-China industrial policy dialogues which are themed to shipbuilding or automobiles will also include the appropriate experts from DG GROW,⁶⁰ beyond the designated DG GROW China desk.⁶¹ Additionally, the bilaterally agreed themes of each dialogue can also lead to collaboration between DGs, to ensure the appropriate expertise is present. However, in this authors experience, such cooperation appears to be more theoretical than a reality due to the “silo mentality”⁶² of the DGs.⁶³ Nevertheless, officials from DGs focusing on similar sectors do appear to spectate each other’s dialogues with China on an ad-hoc basis.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels

⁵⁹ The existence of a China desk will be dependent on a) the DG in question having an external dimension and b) an applicable bilateral dialogue with China. For example, China is a third country, so DG Enlargement manages no EU-China dialogues)

⁶⁰ DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW)

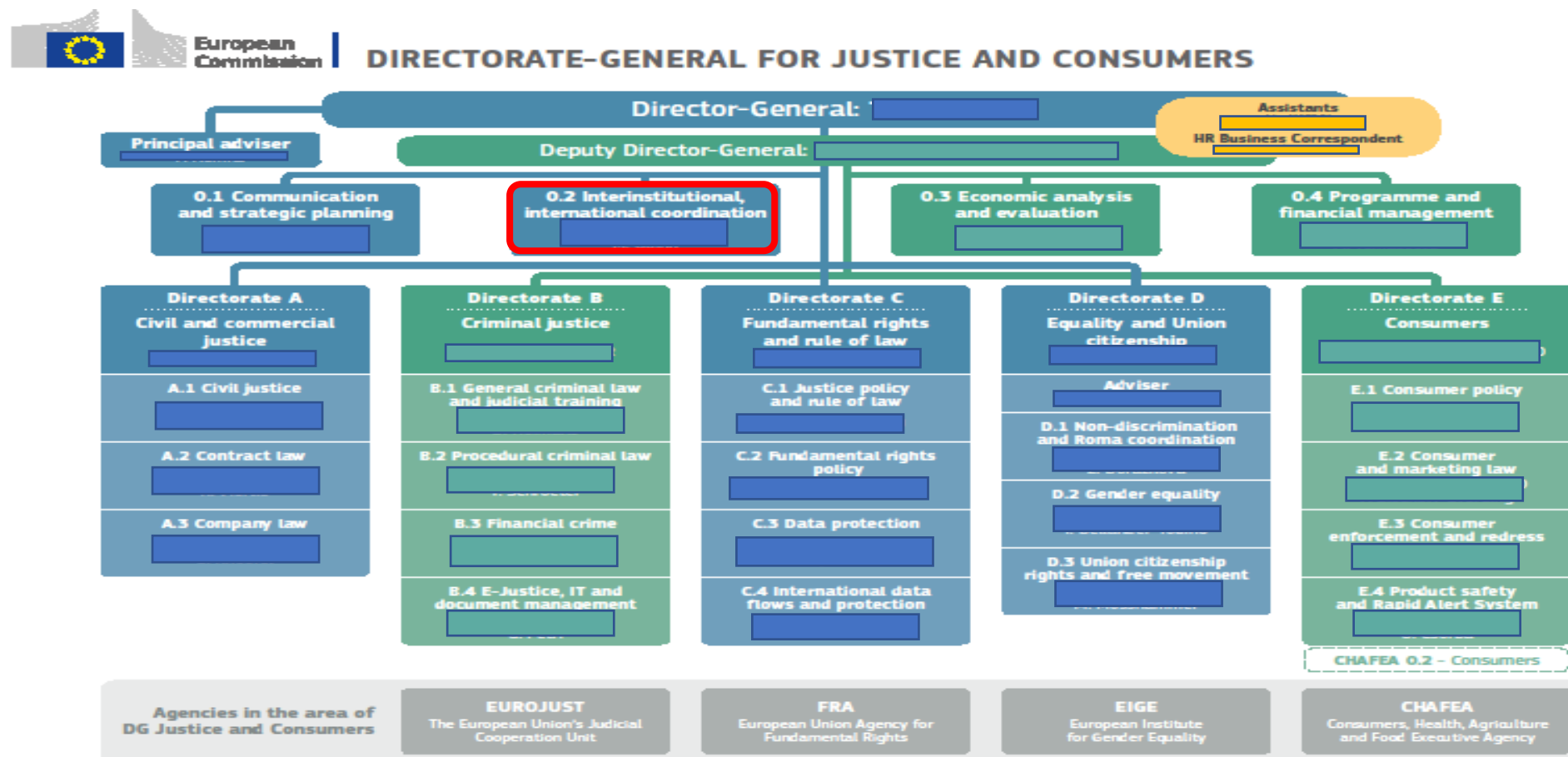
⁶¹ Interview with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

⁶² Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

⁶³ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 10.02.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

⁶⁴ Interviews with officials from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm; DG EMPL on 03.10.2017 at 10.00am; and DG JUST on 11.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

Figure 5.2 Organisation structure for DG Justice and Consumers (JUST): International Cooperation Unit [Anonymised] (EU Commission, 2018viii)



Seconded staff

- Clara Martínez Alberola, seconded as Head of Cabinet of President Juncker.
- Sandra Kramer, seconded as Director of Coordination and Administration in the Cabinet of President Juncker.
- Renate Nikolay, seconded as Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Jourová.
- Michael Shottler, seconded as Member in the Cabinet of President Juncker.

01.06.2018

The European External Action Service

Regarding the EEAS, there is an entire unit almost totally dedicated to EU-China relations: The *China, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Mongolia Unit*, known internally as the *China Division* (See EU, 2018v for the EEAS organisation chart). At the time of writing, the unit has 8 individuals, 2 of which are administrative staff. Beyond the Head and Deputy Head of Unit, the remaining 4 desks are responsible for coordinating multiple clusters of sectors (often thematically similar) managed by the Commission DGs and specific Pillar 1 political dialogues, which are exclusively EEAS managed (EU, 2018vi). These allocations change over time, however, during this thesis's data collection, one desk for example was responsible for EU-China economic dialogues (i.e. coordinating DGs TRADE, ECFIN, GROW etc), while another principally covered the political dialogues focusing on security/defence and those dedicated to individual regions.⁶⁵ It is worth highlighting that some of these individuals in the China division also have responsibility for the EU's relations with Hong Kong and Macao, Taiwan or Mongolia (*ibid.*)

Beyond the China Division, individuals from the EEAS's GLOBAL Directorate also have a significant role in EU-China relations (EU, 2018vii). The directorate includes thematic units which focus on issues such as human rights and climate change (*ibid.*).⁶⁶ These individuals, which effectively act as an additional coordinating force for the thematic priorities of EU relations with third countries like China, often play a role in planning and operationalising EU-China dialogues.⁶⁷ These individuals typically have regional or even global portfolios (*ibid.*).⁶⁸

Throughout the empirical chapters, the term *EU officials* will collectively capture practitioners from both the EEAS and the Commission. Individually, EEAS staff will be described as *EEAS diplomats* and Commission staff will be described as *officials from DG X*, or if greater anonymity is required, simply *Commission officials*. This distinction between the two institutions is reflective of the EEAS alone reflecting a foreign service, populated by diplomats.

⁶⁵ Interviews with diplomats from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 11am; 20.02.2017 at 11.00am and 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

⁶⁶ Interviews with diplomats from the EEAS on 09.03.2017 at 10.00am and 10.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

5.5 The categorisation of EU-China dialogues and its significance for value mainstreaming in practice

5.5.1 The importance of level in EU-China relations and the Chinese party-state structure

The final section of this chapter pertains to the characteristics and format of EU-China dialogues, providing important context into how EU-China dialogues function in practice and the implications of this for value mainstreaming. Firstly, dialogues are categorised by *level*. While this is significant for any formal diplomatic exchange, indicating the political importance of the channel and the seniority of those in attendance, it is particularly important in the case of China. It also has direct implications for EU value mainstreaming.

As noted in Chapter 3.5.1, the most influential ancient Chinese schools of thought prescribe a strict hierarchy to maintain social harmony/order, wherein authority is delegated and centralised to those deemed most capable according to the governing principles (e.g. education, morality, ideological convergence). This is reflected in contemporary Chinese political culture, meaning that the designated level of an EU-China dialogue will strongly determine not only its likely impact, but the power of those on the Chinese side to affect meaningful change on value-related issues.

The impact of this political culture is both practically intensified and complicated by China's *party-state* structure. In this sense, real power on the Chinese side derives from parallel positions in the senior levels of both the state and party apparatus, the latter of which holds ultimate power (Li, 2016:40-44). In this vein, a Vice-Premier who sits on both the Executive Committee of the Chinese government's cabinet - the State Council - and the *Politburo*, which is a top party body, is likely to have much greater practical influence on Chinese policy than Ministers limited to the Party's lower level *Central Committee* body, in conjunction with their State Council Executive Committee seat (Li, 2016: 71-72; 88-89; See: Fig 5.3 and Table 5.1 below).

Similarly, the Vice-Ministers that chair most EU-China dialogues (i.e. those at working-level) hold neither top state nor (typically) top party positions and will thus have a comparatively restricted mandate and decision-making authority for engaging with the EU, impeding any value mainstreaming efforts.⁶⁹ However, it is worth highlighting that

⁶⁹ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 15.02.2017 at 4.00pm, in Brussels.

the personal connections of a given interlocutor on the Chinese side (i.e. familial/factional/collegial), likely unknown to the EU side, may equate to influence disproportionate to their station, transcending these institutional norms (See: Li, 2016:17-24; 207-47). Based on this author's interviews, knowledge of where power truly lies on the Chinese side, either officially or unofficially, tends to be limited among EU officials engaging in EU-China dialogues.

As described in greater depth in Chapter 7.3, these potential power constraints on the Chinese side during dialogues mean that officials may be unable to speak with authority about anything beyond the pre-agreed agenda for the dialogue, as opposed to merely unwilling to do so. They often have to delegate decisions to the upper levels of the party and state apparatus.⁷⁰ This is highly problematic in the context of the practical implementation of the EU's normative power, as EU officials may be deterred or prevented from mainstreaming EU values as a result.

5.5.2 The Chinese party-state structure and the official party-state discourse on values

Relatedly, it is also significant to highlight that the *party-state* structure and its capacity to determine whether officials *can* or *cannot* discuss values in EU-China dialogues, is closely linked to the implementation of the official party-state discourse in this area, which it ensures is strictly shared and expressed by Chinese officials. As Guo (2013:283) highlights, mirroring China's domestic governance, the Party and its ideology plays a strong role in Chinese foreign policy, setting out its "principles and policy guidelines", often anchored around concepts and slogans.

Importantly, the official party-state discourse on values appears not to be limited to officials merely articulating a word-for-word dissemination of China's official position on individual values. Instead, it may also extend to Chinese officials expressing an outright refusal to engage in discussions on values, particularly those that are deemed particularly controversial like human rights. While this crucially aligns with "non-interference in each other's internal affairs" (Guo, 2013:283), one of the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*

⁷⁰ Interview with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

which heavily guide Chinese foreign policy,⁷¹ it is also alluded to in China's guiding EU-China strategy - *China's policy paper on the EU* (2014) - and the joint *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation* (2013).

These documents describe discussion of human rights solely in the context of the dedicated dialogue, alluding to a potential refusal to discuss the value out with these compartmentalised bilateral exchanges. In this vein, *China's policy paper on the EU* (2014) explicitly stipulates conducting "human rights cooperation within the dialogue framework" (MoFA, 2014). Notably, reaffirming analysis in Chapter 3.6, even within the context of the human rights dialogue, these documents suggest that China and by extension the official party-state discourse, is seeking to limit discussion of human rights to areas deemed palatable. In this vein, the Strategic Agenda for Cooperation describes strengthening the human rights dialogue through constructive discussions solely in "jointly agreed key priority areas" (EEAS, 2013), while China's policy paper on the EU notes that:

The Chinese side is ready to continue human rights dialogue with the EU based on the principles of mutual respect and *non-interference in internal affairs* ...The EU side should ...*stop using individual cases to interfere in China's judicial sovereignty and internal affairs* [emphasis added]. (MoFA, 2014)

The implication of these quotes that the Chinese side may refuse to engage with any aspects of human rights it does not wish to discuss, including individual cases or individual civil and political rights as a facet of the value more broadly.

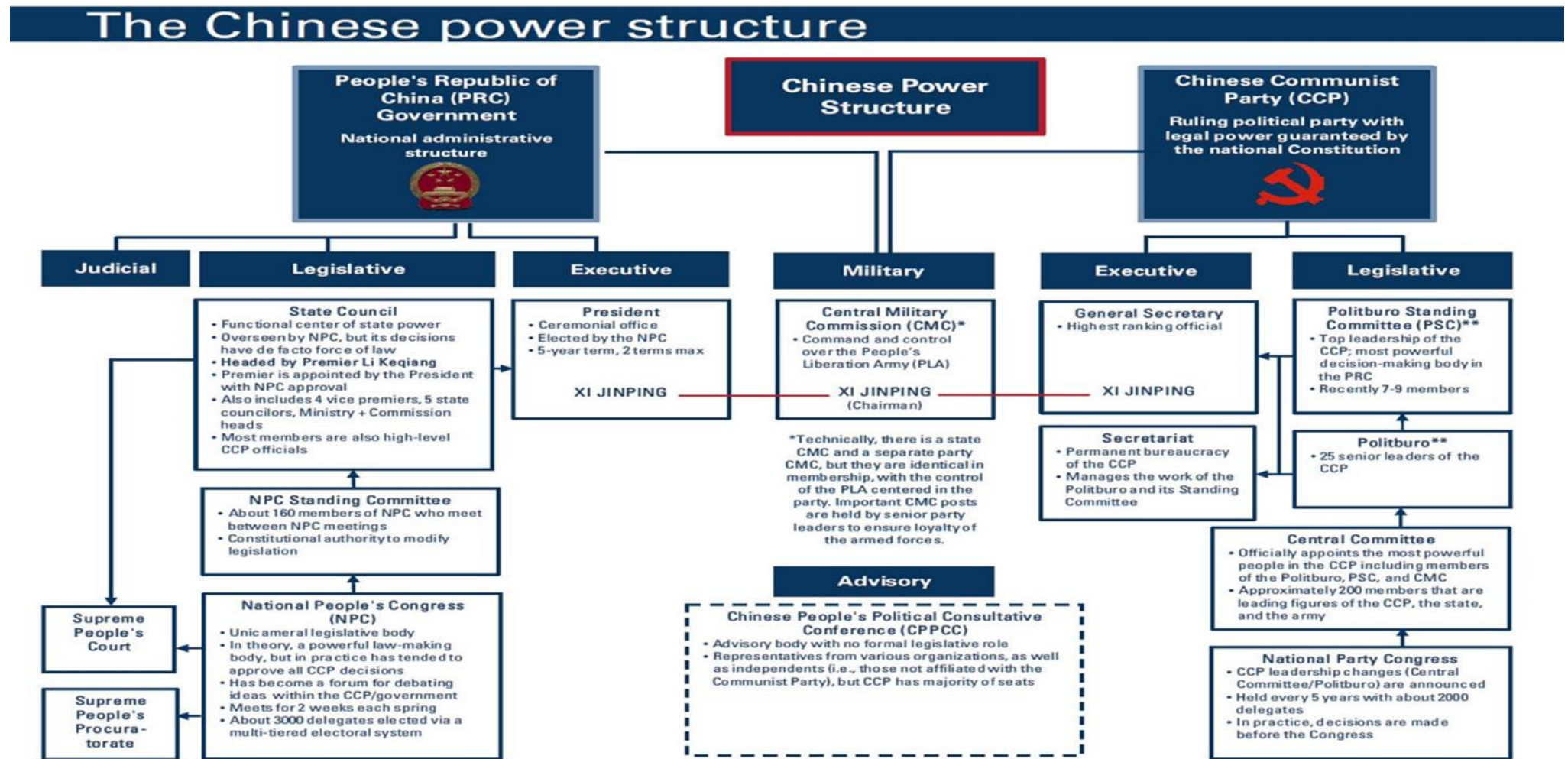
A potential refusal to discuss sensitive EU values by Chinese officials in EU-China dialogues, informed by a facet of the official party-state discourse, has far-reaching implications for the practical implementation of the EU's normative power. If EU officials are avoiding mainstreaming sensitive values like human rights based on resistance (real or expected) by Chinese interlocutors, they could be seen by observers and the Chinese side to be complying with the official party-state discourse themselves and indirectly endorsing the Chinese interpretation of these values.

⁷¹ The Mao-era *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* developed, which emerged in 1954, are i) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; ii) mutual non-aggression; iii) non-interference in each other's internal affairs; iv) equality and mutual benefit; v) and peaceful coexistence (Guo, 2013:283).

Shklar's (1989) landmark political philosophy essay, the *Liberalism of fear*, can inform greater insights into these dynamics and highlight more profound implications for the EU's normative power. Shklar (1989:29) suggests that fear of "cruelty and the fear it inspires", and the totalitarian governance that enables it, represents the foundation of liberal values (including human rights and rule of law) and their continued relevance (See also: *ibid.* p.23).⁷² Reflecting this, if the EU side is failing to confront China's totalitarian system and the conflicting interpretations of *universal* values it encompasses, it would reflect an act of self-harm which erodes the EU's values and their continued relevance. EU officials would be effectively giving into the *fear* that the EU's values are designed to guard against. As Shklar (1989:29) notes, "Systematic fear is the condition that makes freedom impossible".

⁷² This argument is particularly relevant for the European context, with the EU's values born out of a *fear* of repeating the conflict and genocide of the Second World War (See Section 2.3.1).

Figure 5.3 Chinese Party-State power structure (Zero Hedge, 2017)



**See pg. 9 for more information on the Politburo and the selection process for the Politburo Standing Committee.

Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, Congressional Research Service, US-China Business Council, Congressional-Executive Commission on China, iStockPhoto.

Table 5.1 Mapping Power on the Chinese side: Typical parallel state and party posts


(Li, 2016, 46-50, 88-89)

Chinese State post	Membership of State Council Executive Committee (Chinese state cabinet)	Typical parallel senior Chinese Party post according to established institutional norms	Description of Party organ	Typical Size of membership of Party organ
Premier	Yes	Politburo Standing Committee	Top executive organ of the CCP, elected from the Central Committee. Traditionally, members concurrently hold the top state posts.	7* Most consistent membership number in recent decades. However, this body is particularly changeable as a result of internal factional power dynamics*
Executive Vice-Premier	Yes	Politburo Standing Committee		
Vice Premier	Yes	Politburo	Executive organ of the CCP, elected from Central Committee.	25
State Councillor	Yes	Central Committee	Lowest level of the Party leadership consisting of the most senior national and provincial level leaders.	350
Minister	Yes	Central Committee		
Vice-Minister* *Lacks top party or (typically) top party position.	<u>No</u>	<u>None</u>	N/A	N/A

5.5.3 The categorisation of EU-China dialogues by level

Having established the significance of *level* for value mainstreaming, due to its relationship with China's party-state structure, this section outlines how the dialogues are categorised on this basis. Table 5.2 summarises this below.

Table 5.2 Categories of EU-China dialogues (Collated via ESPO, 2013: See Appendix ii)

Level	Seniority of Chair(s) on the EU side	Seniority of Chair on the Chinese side	Seniority of Level 
Summit	Presidents of the European Council and European Commission	Premier	
Senior Ministerial-level (Three High-level dialogues, topping each pillar)	Commissioner	Vice-Premier/State Councillor	
Ministerial-level	Commissioner	Minister	
Working-level	Director General/Deputy-Director General	Vice-Minister	

EU-China Summits

At the highest level is the EU-China summit which takes place once a year, alternating between Brussels and Beijing. The summits are co-chaired by the top EU leadership, including the Presidents of the Commission and the Council, as well as the Chinese Premier, who is head of the State Council and has a prominent seat on China's most senior party body, the Politburo Standing Committee (See: Appendix ii, EU, 2017ii, Table 5.2). The summits are built around a dialogue at the highest level which sees both sides

addressing priority areas of EU-China relations, including dimensions which are too high impact or sensitive to be addressed in other lower-level forums (EU Council, 2017ii; ECFR, 2017). The HR/VP, the EU's Ambassador to China and the Commissioner for Trade are also in attendance at these ultra-high-level exchanges (EU Council, 2017ii). Beyond this central forum, the summits tend to have instalments of other EU-China dialogues taking place on the fringes, depending on what is politically prominent or has simply not taken place already that year (EU, 2017i).

Senior ministerial and ministerial level dialogues

The next level down, are the three *senior ministerial* level dialogues topping each pillar of the strategic partnership; the high level strategic, economic and people-to-people dialogues (Refer to Fig 5.1). These exchanges are typically co-chaired by Commission Vice-Presidents (including the HR/VP) on the EU side and Vice-Premiers or State Councillor's from the Chinese side (See Table 5.3). On both sides, these individuals tend to have thematic portfolios encompassing multiple policy sectors (Appendix ii). For example, the High-level Economic Dialogue is co-chaired by the Commission Vice-President responsible for coordinating all economic DGs and the Chinese Vice-Premier which oversees all economic Chinese ministries (See: BBC, 2018ii; EU Commission, 2018ix:5; Li, 2016:71-72). The High-Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD) reflects an exception where the Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport co-chairs on the EU side (See Appendix ii). It is also worth noting that the relevant EU Commissioners also attend the other two senior ministerial dialogues (*ibid.*).

Below the senior ministerial dialogues are the standard *ministerial* dialogues which remain very senior and are chaired by Commissioners on the EU side (heading the various DGs) and Ministers on the Chinese side (heading the Chinese ministries) (See Appendix ii). It is important to note, as displayed in Table 5.3 below, that the high-level prefix is not restricted to the senior ministerial dialogues described above. More broadly, it is pertinent to highlight that in both senior and ministerial level dialogues, lower-level

officials from both sides will spectate the exchange.⁷³ This makes it possible for high-level decisions/clarifications to inform and improve the efficiency of working level exchanges.⁷⁴

Working-level dialogues

Lastly, the remaining majority of EU-China dialogues are at *working level*. These dialogues are typically chaired on the EU side by a Director-General or Deputy Director-General - individuals which are just below the Commissioners in seniority - and Vice-Ministers on the Chinese side.⁷⁵ In theory, the working level dialogues approach technical areas which can be resolved at lower levels while delegating more controversial issues to the ministerial dialogues.⁷⁶ As outlined in Section 5.5.1, the level of the Chinese co-chair in these working level dialogues is significant for value mainstreaming, as the EU is conducting an exchange with individuals lacking top-tier party and state posts, with the associated decision-making authority.⁷⁷

⁷³ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 15.02.2017 at 4.00pm, in Brussels.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Interviews with officials from the European Commission on 18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing; and 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm (DG GROW), in Brussels.

⁷⁶ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 15.02.2017 at 4.00pm, in Brussels.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

Table 5.3 Senior ministerial and ministerial level EU-China dialogues (Appendix ii; EU, 2018vi; MoFA, 2017)

Dialogue	Senior Ministerial	Ministerial	EU co-chair	Chinese co-chair
High level Strategic Dialogue	X		High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission (HR/VP)	State Councillor for Foreign Affairs
High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue (HED)	X		Vice President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness	Vice Premier for Economic Affairs
High Level People-to-People Dialogue	X		Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport	Vice-Premier for Education, Health, Sports, and Culture
Economic and Trade Joint Committee		X	Commissioner for Trade	Minister of Commerce
Environment Policy Dialogue (EPD)		X	Commissioner for Environment	Minister of Ecology and Environment
High Level Dialogue on an Integrated Approach to Ocean Affairs		X	Commissioner for Maritime Affairs	Administrator of the Chinese State Oceanic Administration (Minister)
High Level Innovation Cooperation Dialogue		X	Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science	Minister of Science and Technology
Legal Affairs Dialogue		X*	Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality *Interviews suggest that this dialogue may continue at working level in the future ⁷⁸	Minister of the Legislative Affairs Office of the State Council

⁷⁸ Interview with an official from DG JUST on 01.03.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

5.6 The format of EU-China dialogues

Concerning the format of EU-China dialogues, most dialogues take place on an annual basis and alternate between Brussels and Beijing. Based on interview accounts and dialogue agendas obtained by the author, the attendance of dialogues is variable, but between 10-20 individuals on each side (i.e. 20-40 in the room) appears to be average (EU Commission, 2017iii).⁷⁹ The delegation on each side will consist of the co-chairs that differ depending on the level of the dialogue, along with the relevant officials, which will include the primary EEAS or Commission *China desk* which has coordinated the dialogues, their Chinese counterparts and additional experts from each side.⁸⁰ This can include civil society individuals such as representatives from NGOs, businesses or academia.⁸¹ Moreover, all dialogues are simultaneously interpreted in English-Mandarin.⁸²

The length and format of the dialogues is variable and sector-specific but will typically last 1-2 days in a multi-section structure (EU Commission 2017i). A typical example would involve a diplomatic exchange for the first half of the dialogue before a section bringing together civil society individuals with officials from both sides (*ibid.*).⁸³ If dialogues last two days, study visits appear to be commonly incorporated.⁸⁴ For example, the EU-China human rights dialogue in June 2017 saw the Chinese delegation taken to visit a refugee centre in Brussels, after a diplomatic exchange the previous day and a roundtable with civil society in the morning (EEAS, 2017iv).⁸⁵

In terms of the substance of the dialogues, they are *themed*, meaning that both sides agree on areas that are of mutual interest for that particular policy sector.⁸⁶ For example, the first ministerial-level Legal Affairs dialogue in 2016 focused on *e-commerce* and *consumer protection*, while the second instalment in 2017 focused on *better regulation*

⁷⁹ Interviews with officials from DG JUST on 16.02.2017; 01.03.2017 at 10.00am and DG ENV on 08.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

⁸⁰ Interviews with officials from DG JUST on 01.03.2017 at 10.00am; DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm; and diplomat from the EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.05.2017 11.00am, in Beijing.

⁸³ Interviews with officials from DG JUST on 01.03.2017 at 10.00am and 11.10.2017 at 11.00am; and DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

⁸⁴ Interviews with an official from DG EMPL on 03.10.2017 at 10.00am and EEAS diplomats on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am and 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

⁸⁵ Interview with a diplomat from EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

⁸⁶ Interviews with officials from DG JUST on 09.02.2017 at 10.30am, 01.03.2017 at 10.00am and 11.10.2017 at 11.00am; and DG EMPL on 03.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

and *improvement of the quality of legislation*.⁸⁷ This bilateral negotiation of themes in advance of dialogues is highly significant for EU value mainstreaming. It reflects an opportunity for EU officials to lobby for topics which connect to EU values during the planning/design phase of dialogues.

Finally, it is important to highlight that while this thesis focuses primarily on how EU officials mainstream values within dialogues, according to the format above, some examples in the findings make reference to cooperation programmes and projects.⁸⁸ These reflect a common output of many EU-China dialogues and consist of mutual agreement to co-fund further cooperation between experts from both sides, in order share/build knowledge in a given area for a time limited period. Perhaps the most numerous and high-profile cooperation programmes and projects have taken place in the context of environment and climate cooperation, largely in mainland China. Many of these were majority or wholly funded by the EU in light of China's pre-2017 status as a developing country.⁸⁹ For example, the EU-China Environmental Governance Programme lasted five years (2010-2015) and consisted of 15 grant-based pilot projects and legal seminars across multiple Chinese provinces, "to improve environmental governance by enhancing public participation and corporate responsibility in China" (EU Commission, 2018v), at a cost of €3,324,000 for the EU (EGP, 2014i; Farnell and Crookes, 2016:179-180).

5.7 Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis throughout this chapter provided contextual insight into how EU-China dialogues function in practice and the implications of this for value mainstreaming. This reflects a crucial backdrop to the subsequent empirical chapters and their assessment of the practical implementation of the EU's normative power. In this

⁸⁷ Interviews with officials from DG JUST on 09.02.2017 at 10.30am, 01.03.2017 at 10.00am and 11.10.2017 at 11.00am.

⁸⁸ For the purpose of clarification, cooperation programmes reflect multiple individual projects under the auspices of a broader issue (e.g. water quality), while cooperation projects are limited in scope to a specific area/purpose.

⁸⁹ As of 2017 China is no longer considered a developing country by the EU and not eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA).
ENV 1, EEAS 6.

regard, the European Commission and the EEAS were established as the two EU institutions responsible for the operationalisation of EU-China dialogues, with insights provided into the small groups of individuals who manage the dialogues and their bureaucratic structures.

The relationship between the two institutions was also explored in the context of mainstreaming EU values with China in practice. To this end, it emerged that while the EEAS cannot enforce such actions by their Commission colleagues, both institutions are equally bound to the value mainstreaming standards expressed in the Lisbon Treaty (2009). Lastly, the chapter outlined the characteristics and format of EU-China dialogues. In this context it emerged that dialogues are categorised by level, based on the seniority of participants. Due to the importance of hierarchy in China's opaque decision-making systems, it emerged that the level of dialogues had implications for officials practically mainstreaming values with China.

Chapter 6 - Challenges to value mainstreaming I: Organisational dynamics

6.1 Introduction

Interviewees' accounts suggested that value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues was rarely taking place in practice, departing from the standards encompassed by the EU's official discourse and normative power Europe (NPE). In this context, Chapter 6 first establishes the EU's official discourse on value mainstreaming found in documents (Section 6.2), providing a crucial reference point for the mainstreaming standards that EU officials should follow. The official discourse is revealed to prescribe *systematic* value mainstreaming in all dialogues with third countries, which aligns with NPE's ideal-type conceptualisation of the EU and its mechanism of procedural diffusion.

Section 6.3 focuses on analysis of the elite interviews carried out for thesis. The analysis shows that systematic value mainstreaming is not taking place in EU-China dialogues. It also reveals that these dynamics can be explained through the discourses shared by EU officials. These fall into two discursive categories: *organisational discourses* and those surrounding *China's role*. The latter is addressed in Chapter 7, while this chapter explores the two organisational discourses, invoked by officials when discussing the topic.

Thereafter the chapter highlights how these discourses may be being enabled or actively reproduced by the language found in the EU's China country strategy (6.5). Finally, the chapter details how a lack of coordination of value mainstreaming in the EU's internal meeting mechanisms - in Brussels and Beijing - connects to the established discourses impacting such practices in EU-China dialogues (6.6).

6.2 Establishing the official discourse on the practical implementation of EU norms

6.2.1 The Lisbon Treaty: Article 21 and supporting articles

While historically implicit in EC/EU treaties when the normative power thesis was developed in 2002, the 2009 Lisbon Treaty for first time explicitly stated in article 21.1 that the EU's external action is built upon its values, being:

Guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world [the EU's values are then listed] (EU, 2010i:28)

Article 21.1 also clarifies that the EU's partnerships with third countries will be predicated upon those actors sharing the EU's values (EU, 2010i:28). Additionally, Article 21.2 notes that the EU "shall define and pursue common policies" (EU, 2010i:28) and work with international partners to realise its values internationally, while Article 21.3 describes how the "development and implementation of the different areas of the Union's external action" (EU, 2010i:29) will be based upon the overarching normative objectives elucidated in 21.1 and 21.2.

It is important to acknowledge that this constitutional document has multiple audiences. It is intended for domestic consumption, legitimising the EU's external action to member states' citizens, as well as presenting a mandate to third countries. However, the document also has practical implications for EU officials' activities. In this sense, it formalises an official discourse on value promotion with third countries.

This normative basis for the EU's external action is reinforced throughout the Lisbon Treaty. For example, Article 22.1 (Chapter 1, Title V) describes how the EU's "strategic interest and objectives", identified by the Council shall be based upon Article 21. This all-encompassing and agenda-setting role of EU values reinforces the notion that they should play a central role in all EU-China dialogues, regardless of substance.

Moreover, Title VI, Article 47, states that "the Union shall have legal personality" (EU, 2010i: 41), which establishes (for the first time) that the EU formally represents an international actor distinct from its member states, that can build bilateral relationships with third countries as well as join international organisations (*See also*: Piris, 2010:86-

87). This is pertinent, as it resolves past and widely disputed⁹⁰ legal ambiguities about the EU's actorness. It also arguably reinforces the legal power of the Lisbon Treaty and thus the EU's obligations, including the normative basis of its external action.

Conversely and of great importance to EU-China dialogues, Part Five, Title 1 details how each key policy sector of the Union's external action "shall be guided by the principles, pursue the objectives and be conducted in accordance with... Chapter 1 of Title V", reaffirming Article 21. This explicit reinforcement of Article 21 also takes place in the sections dedicated to individual policy sectors.⁹¹

Lastly, it is worth noting that Article 24.3 (Chapter 2, Section 1), highlights how beyond the EU level institutions (which reflect the focus of this thesis), member states are legally bound to "support the Union's external and security policy actively and unreservedly" (EU, 2010i:30) and "refrain from any action which is contrary to the interests of the Union" (EU, 2010i:30). As the Union's interests are based upon the EU's values, this means that member states are obliged to actively reinforce the EU's values with third countries, such as China. This constitutional prescription appears to stand in contrast to portrayals of weak unity on value promotion by member states in existing literature (See Chapter 3.7).

In the context of applying discourse analysis, despite the Lisbon Treaty explicitly suggesting that the EU's values holistically underpin the EU's external action, it is challenging to discern the practical implications for value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues. The key reference for value mainstreaming, Article 21.1, remains vague and open to interpretation.

While the EU being "guided" (EU, 2010i:28) by its values could imply practitioners *actively* and *systematically* seeking to integrate EU values into all dialogues with third countries (a hard interpretation), it could also refer to a far more passive arrangement, where diplomats' activities are merely *informed* by EU values, acting as a backdrop for their engagement with third countries like China and not explicitly featuring in dialogues (a soft interpretation).

⁹⁰ As Piris (2010:87) articulates, pre-Lisbon Treaty, 'the exact scope of... [the EU's] legal personality' was disputed in academic and governmental circles.

⁹¹ For example, Title II, Article 207, 'The common commercial policy shall be conducted in the context of the principles and objectives of the Union's external action' (EU, 2010i:140)

Unfortunately, existing literature appears unable to clarify this inherent ambiguity. For example, Jean Claude Piris (2010:243), involved with the treaty's drafting,⁹² maintains that the intended reading of the article is that the EU's values are "applicable to *all* sectors of external policy, in addition to their own specific objectives [emphasis added]". While this clarifies that the EU's values have a role in *all* EU-China dialogues, it remains unclear what this *applicability* entails for practical mainstreaming activities by EU officials.

6.2.2 Further interpreting Article 21

However, the analysis of supplementary thematic policy documents below, connected to the promotion of human rights and sustainable development, further clarifies the official discourse and its practical implications for value mainstreaming. Following this, a hard interpretation of Article 21 emerges. The analysis also reveals a sub-discourse which infers that existing mainstreaming practices by EU officials are not meeting the standards/practices prescribed by this (clarified) official discourse. This arguably alludes to the existence of different discourses being shared by EU officials, which inform alternative approaches to value mainstreaming in dialogues (as elucidated later in this chapter).

The documents analysed below differ in their intended audiences, with some predominantly working guidelines for EU officials and others also being aimed at EU citizens and third countries. All serve to build a clearer picture of the practical prescriptions of the official discourse.

It is also worth highlighting that while this thesis focuses on the promotion of human rights and sustainable development, the absence of comparable documents dedicated to the external promotion of other EU values (which are collectively specified in Article 21), suggest that the official discourse, clarified below, is applicable to the promotion of *all* EU values with third countries.

Moreover, it is important to note that the key human rights policy documents also encompass rule of law (as well as liberal democracy). This reinforces the EU's conceptual

⁹² Jean-Claude Piris was legal adviser to the Council during the negotiation and adoption of the 2009 Lisbon treaty, as well as the Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1997), Nice (2001) and Constitutional/Rome (2004) treaties.

linkage between rule of law and human rights in its external action which is institutionalised in EU-China relations (See Chapter 3.6). Conversely, as noted in Chapter 3.5, liberal democracy is side-lined from EU-China relations.

Key human rights documents

Concerning human rights, arguably the most relevant document is the *Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Human rights and Democracy* (EU Council, 2012i) and its updated 2015-2019 Action Plan (EU Commission 2015i). These jointly reflect the guiding documents for the promotion of human rights and democracy in the EU's external action and are principally aimed at EU officials. The document states that:

Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union has reaffirmed the EU's determination to promote human rights and democracy through all its external actions. (EU Council, 2012i:2)

Building on this, it notes in the case of human rights that "The EU will promote human rights in *all areas* of its external action *without exception* [emphasis added]" (EU Council, 2012i:2), before listing all major sectors of cooperation with third countries. The language infers that EU officials should be actively mainstreaming human rights into their dialogues ("promote"), as well as suggesting that this practice is applicable to *all* dialogues with third countries, regardless of sectoral substance.

The 2015-2019 Action Plan, a stock-taking *update* for the above document, further reinforces this hard interpretation of Article 21. It emphasises the need for "better coherence and consistency" by the Commission and the EEAS:

Through mainstreaming human rights considerations into the external aspects of EU policies, particularly with regard to trade/investment, migration/refugee/asylum and development policies as well as counter-terrorism. (EU Commission, 2015ii:6)

Interestingly, the language also suggests that existing human rights mainstreaming activities by the Commission and the EEAS are not meeting the strict standards of the official discourse, chiefly in the sectors specified. In particular, the idea that EU officials working with trade and investment portfolios are side-lining EU values in practice,

appears to align with the dominant criticism of NPE, that material interests prevail in the EU's external action (See Chapter 2.4). Importantly this language is also identifiable in other key human rights policy documents, making it arguably *a sub-discourse* of the official discourse on value mainstreaming.

These clarifications of the official discourse are reinforced and expanded by the Council of the European Union's annual reports on human rights and democracy promotion.⁹³ These documents seek to display the EU's work every year in internationally promoting human rights. As a result, unlike the documents above, there is greater emphasis in displaying the EU's prioritisation and resolve in promoting human rights to EU citizens and third countries. Nevertheless, they also importantly aim to reaffirm EU officials' practical obligations to promote human rights. For example, the 2014 report describes the need to "mainstream human rights considerations into the full range of EU external policies" (EU Council, 2015:11) while the 2016 report states that:

Human rights issues should not be confined to human rights dialogues ... [but] included in the agenda of other meetings, including political or other dialogues.
(EU Council, 2017i:7)

As well as shoring up the notion that human rights should be mainstreamed into all sectoral dialogues with third countries, the language in the quote once again suggests that in practice, human rights promotion is seldom taking place beyond the dedicated dialogue (i.e. promotion "should not be confined human rights dialogues").

However, most pertinently, the report further clarifies the official discourse, describing the need for the "*systematic* mainstreaming of human rights [emphasis added]" (EU Council, 2017i:5). In this respect, the document expands upon the language found in the Strategic Framework/Action Plan documents, with the word "*systematic*", suggesting that human rights mainstreaming should be operationalised by officials through active and purposeful actions. This language is also clearly displayed in the EU's Global Strategy,⁹⁴ which is aimed at similar audiences. It states that "we must... *systematically* mainstream

⁹³ This thesis focuses on 2014, 2015 and 2016 Annual reports (See: EU Council, 2015; 2016; 2017i), which cover the chronology of this project's extensive research interviews. The reports are released the year after the material they cover. For example, the 2014 report was published in 2015.

⁹⁴ Full title: Shared Vision, Common Action, a Stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy.

human rights and gender issues across policy sectors and institutions [emphasis added]” (EU, 2016i:11).

Another key example, which reaffirms the argued substance of the official discourse is the European Parliament’s *Committee on Foreign Affairs*’ (AFET) only report to date on EU-China relations (2015). The document, which directly informed the 2016 *Elements for a new EU strategy on China* document (See Section 6.4.3),⁹⁵ “calls on the EEAS to ensure that human rights are high on the agenda in relations and dialogues with China” (EU Parliament, 2015i:11) and “urges the EU to continue pressing for an improvement of the human rights situation in China whenever dialogues are held at any level” (EU Parliament, 2015i:18).

The language explicitly highlights how human rights should not only feature in all dialogues (i.e. “whenever dialogues are held at any level”) but that these issues should be at the forefront of exchanges (“high on the agenda”). This confirms the notion of systematic mainstreaming activities by *all officials* in *every dialogue*. Additionally, the quotes also display the argued sub-discourse, suggesting that officials are not integrating human rights into every dialogue with China (i.e. AFET “urges the EU to continue pressing for an improvement of the human rights situation in China”).

Finally, it is important to highlight that the need for systematic value mainstreaming is reinforced in sector-specific documents. A particularly notable example pertains to trade and investment, an area cast by existing literature as prone to side-lining EU values. *Trade for all - Towards a more responsible trade and investment* (2015) seeks to present an integral role for values in EU trade policy and it is aimed at domestic and external audiences, as well as informing the working practices of EU officials.

The document explicitly reinforces the argued clarification of the official discourse, through its recognition that “trade policy can be a powerful tool to further the advancement of human rights in third countries” (EU Commission, 2015iii:25) and it is committed to “ensure the implementation of the provisions on trade and investment of the EU 2015-2018 human rights action plan” (*ibid.* p.26). Notably, the document is inherently framed according to the sub-discourse suggesting that existing value

⁹⁵ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

mainstreaming practices are not meeting the standards of the official discourse. In this vein, it describes how the strategy is reflective of the Commission needing to adapt:

Its approach to trade policy to take all of these lessons on board ...meaning it will be more effective, more transparent and will not only project our interests, but also our values. (*ibid.*)

The above analysis suggests that the EU's official discourse on value mainstreaming can be clarified as *EU values should be systematically mainstreamed into all dialogues with third countries*. The analysis also alludes to a sub-discourse casting existing practices as not meeting these standards.

Key sustainable development documents

Although often being dedicated to internal EU policy as well as external relations, key sustainable development documents - encompassing the environmental dimension focused upon by this thesis - appear to confirm this argued clarification of the official discourse. The EU's response to the UN's *2030 Agenda for sustainable development* at the international level, *Next steps for a sustainable future: European Action for Sustainability* (2016) and its accompanying action plan (*Key European action supporting the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals*), reflect arguably the key contemporary reference documents for the EU's promotion of sustainable development in practice.

Like several documents analysed above, the central *Next steps for a sustainable future* document is intended for multiple audiences. It aims to assert the EU's commitment to sustainable development to EU citizens and third countries as well as promote the value's inclusion in EU officials' activities. Conversely, its accompanying action plan has primarily an internal focus, being designated as a "Commission staff working document" (EU Commission, 2016ii:1). In a broad context, the central document describes how:

The Commission will mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals into EU policies and initiatives, with *sustainable development as an essential guiding principle for all of its policies*. (EU Commission, 2016i:18)

Aligning with the clarified official discourse, the language suggests that mainstreaming sustainable development is relevant to *all* EU policy sectors. Additionally, its characterisation of the value as "an essential guiding principle for ...all policies" infers that

EU officials should be prioritising sustainable development and its promotion in *all* of their activities, including dialogues with third countries.

This is reaffirmed by a section in the document dedicated to the EU's external action. It states, with reference to the guiding UN document, that "the vision of the 2030 Agenda is fully consistent with the objectives of EU external action, including the pursuit of sustainable development" (EU Commission, 2016i:13).⁹⁶ Reinforcing the applicability of sustainable development to EU-China dialogues, the document emphasises that the promotion of sustainable development is not restricted to lower income developing countries, but "more advanced developing countries" (like China) in the context of "more differentiated partnerships in accordance with our partners' development paths and needs" (*ibid.*).

Importantly and mirroring the human rights documents, the document suggests the need for *systematic* mainstreaming activities by Commission and EEAS diplomats, noting that:

Keeping track of progress in a *systematic* and transparent way is essential... the Commission will carry out more detailed regular monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals in an EU context [emphasis added]. (EU Commission, 2016i:16)

The language here also notably alludes to the sub-discourse suggesting that existing mainstreaming practices are not meeting the standards of the official discourse. Existing monitoring of sustainable development is cast as not sufficiently detailed and necessitating the creation of a new reference framework for officials. Reaffirming this, the accompanying action plan casts mainstreaming the value as an ongoing *work in progress*, describing the Commission's "commitment ...to further mainstreaming it [sustainable development] into its policy-making" (EU Commission, 2016ii:2).

However, this interlinked sub-discourse appears to be softer than that found in the human rights documents. The language alludes almost solely to weak institutional mechanisms for mainstreaming sustainable development, as opposed to EU officials actively side-lining the value from dialogues. Arguably, this emphasises how sustainable development, particularly its environmental facet, is largely uncontroversial with third countries, unlike

⁹⁶ This is explicitly reaffirmed in the accompanying action plan which reaffirms sustainable development's applicability "both within the EU and through EU external action" (EU Commission, 2016ii:2) and the need for "EU action is to be coordinated also with our external partners bilaterally and at global level" (*ibid.*).

human rights. This suggests that officials may be more amenable to raising the value in practice.

6.2.3 Summarising the official discourse and its implications

Overall, the analysis of key sustainable development documents confirms the substance of the official discourse as: *EU values should be systematically mainstreamed into all dialogues with third countries*. This clarification, representing a hard interpretation of Article 21, aligns with NPE's ideal-type and the mechanism of *procedural diffusion*, which captures active and purposeful actions by EU officials to integrate values into dialogues with third countries like China. It also allows for a distinction to be made between officials systematically mainstreaming values in Brussels and Beijing, theorised by *overt diffusion* (See Chapter 2.3.3). The relationship between NPE and the official discourse is summarised in Table 6.1 below.

The clarified official discourse also importantly aligns with broader definitions of *mainstreaming*. For example, in the context of gender, the Council of Europe defines mainstreaming as:

The (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making. (COE, 2018)

Similarly, in associated academic literature De Waal (2006:10) describes mainstreaming as “deliberate, planned [and] intended strategy” necessitating “deliberate and focused interventions at every level”. Both definitions capture active and systematic attempts by individuals to incorporate gender into all their activities.

It is also worth highlighting that implied ideal *end-point* of any type of mainstreaming efforts is that the desired activities become so ingrained that systematic actions are no longer necessary. As the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women notes in the context of gender mainstreaming: “the long-term objective is that

attention to gender equality will pervade all policies” (UN Women, 2018). Similarly, in the case of EU value mainstreaming, one EEAS diplomat described how “If mainstreaming succeeds, it’s invisible”.⁹⁷

Reflecting the official discourse and expanding upon the established roles of the EEAS and the Commission in EU-China dialogues (Chapter 5.4), the following behaviour would be expected by the EEAS and Commission officials operationalising EU-China dialogues. Firstly, considering the EEAS’s *coordinating* role, it would be expected that EEAS diplomats are actively promoting systematic value mainstreaming amongst their Commission colleagues, both through ad-hoc contacts and formal meeting mechanisms. Secondly, it would be expected that officials from both institutions would be undertaking systematic activities to design EU values into their dialogues with China and explicitly or implicitly raising them with their counterparts. However, the sub-discourse identified in documents suggests that EU officials may not be realising these expectations in practice, potentially sharing different discourses which contravene the official discourse and NPE.

⁹⁷ Interview with a diplomat from EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

Table 6.1 Convergence between the EU's official discourse on value mainstreaming and NPE

EU's official discourse on value mainstreaming	Normative power Europe (NPE)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EU's external action is informed by its values <p><i>(Lisbon Treaty [2009], Article 21.1)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideal-type conceptualisation theorises the EU's values as its defining international identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU values should be systematically mainstreamed into all dialogues with third countries <p><i>(Clarified official discourse)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EU should aspire to prioritise its values in its external action. <i>Procedural diffusion</i> theorises how the EU actively and purposely shares its normative power through institutionalised relationships with third countries, encompassing bilateral dialogues. Overt diffusion informs a theoretical distinction between value mainstreaming by Brussels-based and Beijing-based officials.

6.3 Assessing the practical mainstreaming of EU values in EU-China dialogues: Summarising the research findings

Bar those individuals operationalising the human rights dialogue, the analysis of interviewees' accounts found that officials were not systematically mainstreaming values into EU-China dialogues. This applied to both EEAS and Commission officials based in Brussels and Beijing.

At the most general level, interviewees explicitly suggested that systematic mainstreaming of EU values was not taking place in their dialogues. Reflecting this, the author first asked all interviewees about their primary objectives in dialogues. While the *raison d'être* of any dialogue is defined by its sectoral policy focus, in almost every case, the interviewees centred exclusively on the technical/material dimensions of their dialogues, while neglecting to specify any normative objectives or systematic value mainstreaming practices. This was reinforced by their responses to more specific questions focusing on the extent to which EU values (both more broadly and human rights and sustainable development specifically) were being integrated into their dialogues.

This broad finding, that there is a lack of systematic value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues, appears to support the suggestion in existing literature that the EU is sidelining its values in favour of its material interests. However, this project's original focus on the micro-level processes of EU-China dialogues, uncovers more nuanced explanations for the apparent weakness of the EU's normative power with China in practice.

Discourse analysis of interviewees' accounts revealed that EU officials justified this lack of systematic value mainstreaming through two discursive categories. Firstly, the *organisational discourses* highlighted institutional dynamics and understanding of roles and responsibilities as rationales for individual behaviour related to value mainstreaming. Discourse 1 cast value mainstreaming as implicit to EU-China dialogues, so requiring no further efforts by officials to realise and discourse 2 portrayed value mainstreaming as not relevant to officials' specific policy sectors, instead being the responsibility of other designated individuals/dialogues.

The second category pertained to *China's role* in impeding value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues. These discourses captured how the actions of the Chinese side were a primary rationale for individual value mainstreaming behaviour. In this vein, discourse 3 characterised China's expected obstructive response to mainstreaming the most controversial EU values as a principal barrier. Relatedly, discourse 4 cast mainstreaming these controversial values as pointless, as well as risky, due to a perception amongst officials that their counterparts would be most likely unable to meaningfully impact Chinese policy connected to these areas. This view appeared to be informed by the opacity of China's institutions and decision-making structures.

Lastly, discourse 5, which can be characterised as *China is not listening to the EU and it should be*, captured frustrations on the EU side that China was not aligning with EU values. It appeared to inform didactic approaches in the rare instances when mainstreaming did take place and a pessimism perpetuating these approaches, at the expense of more creative/effective strategies.

Beyond this, it emerged that a lack of understanding of China on the EU side, based on limited cultural and linguistic knowledge amongst officials, appeared to also be contributing to these discourses (See Chapter 8). The analysis also importantly identified and assessed existing value mainstreaming practices by EU officials (See Chapter 9). Encompassed by the concept of *partial mainstreaming*, it appeared that EU values were sporadically entering dialogues, irrespective of a lack of systematic efforts to incorporate them by officials. This was seemingly based on EU values being pre-built into all sectors of EU-China relations.

It also emerged that the EEAS was undertaking ad-hoc efforts to promote value mainstreaming amongst their Commission colleagues. These activities highlight that EU values are underpinning EU-China dialogues in practice and thus the existence of the EU's normative power with China in practice. However, the analysis also revealed that these activities were limited in scope versus the systematic actions prescribed by the official discourse. Consequently, they are unable to fully realise the ideal-type of NPE with China.

This chapter will focus specifically on the *organisational discourses* specified above, before Chapter 7 addresses the discourses surrounding *China's role*. The examples analysed below display both how systematic value mainstreaming is not taking place in practice (often in an explicit fashion) and crucially, how the organisational discourses are informing this.

Notably throughout these examples, the language often alludes to other discourses. In particular, EU officials often also expressed discourse 3, which, as described in the following chapter, appeared to be the dominant discourse impacting the practical implementation of the EU's normative power. Reflecting this, interviewees could be seen to generally attach negative connotations to value mainstreaming, associating such practices with promoting the most controversial values in EU-China relations, particularly human rights.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that the interviews reflect a different context to policy documents. Unlike the premeditated language in documents which is politically calibrated towards civil society and third countries, officials' responses in the non-attributable interviews conducted for this thesis, tended to be more spontaneous and reflective of the reality of EU-China dialogues. While, as noted in Chapter 4, it is possible that interviewees adjusted their accounts due to my status as a scholar, their consistently frank and mutually reinforcing responses which revealed activities that diverged from the official discourse, arguably indicated otherwise. Their activities were being portrayed in a manner which did not look favourable for the EU or even necessarily themselves. Generally, it appeared that interviewees did not consider the role of values in their dialogues, with questions effectively prompting them to think about and justify the role of values on the spot. This emphasises the lack of systematic value mainstreaming taking place in practice.

6.4 Organisational discourses

6.4.1 Discourse 1: EU values implicit in EU-China dialogues

Examples of discourse 1, surrounding the perception amongst EU officials that *values are implicit to their dialogues and therefore require no additional activities to realise*, could be identified in the accounts of Brussels-based and Beijing-based officials, across the breadth of EU-China relations. This included the *Pillar 2 Economic & sectoral dialogues* and *Pillar 3 People-to-People dialogues (PPD)* operationalised by the Commission, and the Pillar 1 Political dialogues implemented by the EEAS, which also coordinates all other dialogues. The discourse appeared to be most prevalent in the accounts of those involved with Pillar 3.

Additionally, it is important to highlight how discourse 1 connects with criticisms of the EU's normative power being un-reflexive and neo-colonial (See Chapter 2.4). The discourse encompasses a perception that the EU's external action is inherently *good* and meeting the ideal standards of the EU's values, as opposed to requiring constant vigilance and reflexivity to deliver. It can also be argued that the discourse is effectively meeting China's interests in its practical impact. A perception amongst EU officials that EU values

do not require additional systematic actions to operationalise, informs such issues not being tabled in EU-China dialogues.

Pillar 2: Economic & sectoral dialogues

Regarding Pillar 2 dialogues, a notable example could be seen in the account of a DG Trade (TRADE) official. Mirroring many interviewees, they emphasised that their objectives surrounded sector specific issues, in this case solely connected to EU economic interests, with no mention of EU values embodied by Article 21/NPE. When asked about the role of values in trade dialogues, they appeared to have to think about how this dimension entered their activities. They described how EU values like human rights and sustainable development were “under the surface” of their dialogues with the Chinese side, which “are just sort of built on, part of our values...and [our] understanding that this is what is good”.⁹⁸ In line with discourse 1, the language first explicitly suggests that EU values are not being systematically integrated into dialogues, as they are already passively informing exchanges with the Chinese side (i.e. “under the surface”).

Providing deeper insight into this, the interviewee then describes how the dialogue is inherently normative as a) the sectoral substance is based upon EU-values (“part of our values”) and b) they, as EU officials believe in these values (“[our] understanding that this is what is good”). Additionally, the language implies that EU values reflect a passive, abstract dimension of their dialogues with China (“just sort of built on” EU values), as opposed to an active, systematically integrated component.

The discourse was similarly identifiable in other sectoral dialogues. For example, the author asked an official from DG JUST about the extent to which human rights dimensions were being systematically designed into the EU-China Legal-Affairs Dialogue (LAD). In response they described how:

That’s implicit. I mean, obviously the upfront objective is better discussion of... understanding of our respective legal systems, but if that leads to positive progress in other areas, then that’s a good thing.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 10.03.2017 at 3.00pm, in Brussels.

⁹⁹ Interview with an official from DG JUST on 11.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

As in the previous example, the interviewee can be seen to openly concede that EU values (in this case human rights) are not being *systematically* integrated into their dialogue. This justified on the basis that the technical substance and objectives of the dialogue have an “implicit” normative, as well as material basis. Reaffirming this passive role ascribed to EU values in the dialogue, the interviewee infers that any progress in China realising EU human rights standards would reflect an unintentional, but welcome by-product of this dialogue (i.e. “if that leads to positive progress in other areas, then that’s a good thing”).

The interviewee also suggests that this implicit, background role of values, as opposed one of parity with sector-specific technical objectives, is almost self-evident (i.e. “obviously the upfront objective is...”). This emphasises the ingrained nature and thus power of the discourse, as well as its impact on mainstreaming practices. Interestingly, the notion of an “upfront objective” also connects to discourse 3 and the associated fear of explicitly raising values with the Chinese side for fear of obstructive responses.

As described in Chapter 3, the LAD has been designed to promote human rights indirectly through promoting areas of rule of law palatable to the Chinese side. However, the example above highlights that active attempts to integrate human rights or even rule of law dimensions into exchanges during the planning and implementation of each dialogue are not taking place. Consequently, not only are the interviewee’s activities running contrary to the official discourse, but the lack of background discussion to design EU values into the channel (even indirectly) calls into question the validity and effectiveness of the LAD.

Strong examples of Discourse 1 could also be identified in the accounts of Commission officials involved in the overlapping climate change/energy/environment sectors. Akin to the DG TRADE example above, one DG Climate Action (CLIMA) official described having exclusively technical objectives with China, surrounding the international climate negotiations. Responding to a question about the role of values in their dialogue (particularly human rights and sustainable development), they stated that “on a meta-level we can always tell of values”, before elaborating that “with China, [when] engaging with this regime” it is a “natural process” that “values are shared and discussed”.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Interview with an official from DG CLIMA on 16.02.2017 at 9.30am, in Brussels.

The question prompts the interviewee justify their lack of systematic value mainstreaming according to the rationale of discourse 1, with values being “shared and discussed” cast as an inherent outcome from exchanges (i.e. a “natural process”). This is reinforced by their characterisation of values existing on an abstract “meta-level” as opposed to something more substantial that requires purposeful actions to realise. Additionally, the suggestion that we can “always tell of values” at this *meta-level*, again alludes to the ingrained nature of the discourse and its tangible impact on value mainstreaming.

Pillar 3: People-to-People Dialogue(s)

Discourse 1 appeared to be particularly dominant in the accounts of Commission officials operationalising Pillar 3 People-to-People dialogues (PPD) from DG Education and Culture (EAC). As one official noted, in the context of general value promotion with China:

Let's say that explicitly it's not very often that these elements come up, but in the projects we support, implicitly we very strongly support our values. [For example] ...in education ...we have been supporting a project which is called ...'EU-China tuning' where we intend to make our higher education systems more compatible, more coordinated in a way, and this helps, in the longer term, also the recognition the accreditation of the diplomas that the students take, the support of mobility of students ...and as the result, we push ...inject, or to share at least our values also in terms of educational methodologies ...in the higher education systems in China.¹⁰¹

As in prior examples, the interviewee confirms that systematic value mainstreaming is not taking place, with EU values “not very often” being explicitly raised with the Chinese side. Displaying discourse 1, they then suggest that this lack of explicit mainstreaming is justified by the cooperation programmes and projects - which reflect a key outcome from these dialogues - being implicitly based upon EU values.

The example they provide emphasises how passive this connection to EU values is in practice. They portray a very long-term and subtle promotion of EU values, which is predicated upon limited (if any) direct action by the EU side. In this sense, the discourse is

¹⁰¹ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 10.02.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

informing activities which are far removed from the systematic mainstreaming practices envisioned by the official discourse. Much like the DG TRADE example analysed above, the interviewee also implies that they are sufficiently promoting EU values with China because DG EAC officials believe in these values and this impacts dialogues (“implicitly we very strongly support our values”).

Supporting these conclusions, the interviewee more explicitly described how their lack of systematic mainstreaming activities derived from the rationale of discourse 1:

It’s almost implicit and obvious ...because in any type of activities, I mean, even in the negotiation on trade areas, there is our position which of course reflects a range of values ...I mean, when you discuss environment there are of course, principles behind that reflect our values.¹⁰²

Aligning with prior examples, their language portrays individual sectors of the EU’s external action as inherently normative with (“principles behind [them] reflect our values”) and thus no further action is required by EU officials to realise them. Their language also again alludes to the power of discourse 1, through suggesting that such perspectives are almost self-evident (“implicit and obvious”) and “of course” reflect EU values.

In another example, an official involved with cultural dialogues, described how “no, I must say we...we don’t mention human rights issues during our HPPD [High-level People-to-People Dialogue] or ...cultural policy dialogue”.¹⁰³ They justified this lack of systematic mainstreaming on the basis that:

Our cultural cooperation actually is based on the 2005 UNESCO Convention ...for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions.¹⁰⁴

Mirroring their colleague, the interviewee appears to justify their non-integration of human rights into the dialogues on the inherently normative basis of PPD (i.e. “the 2005 UNESCO Convention” informing cultural dialogues), with its connections to individual civil and political rights, particularly freedom of expression. Again, the implication is that no

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 17.06.2015 at 5.00pm, in Brussels.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

further action is necessary to realise EU values in exchanges, departing from the systematic value mainstreaming prescribed by the official discourse.

Qualifying the examples above, it is important to acknowledge that PPD differs from other pillars of EU-China relations, in being built upon the premise of facilitating civil society exchanges between the EU and China through official-level dialogues, to increase mutual understanding on areas like values. In this sense, it is portrayed as less instrumental and agenda-based than other dialogues. However, although this may explain why discourse 1 is particularly strong in PPD, these officials are still bound by the standards of the official discourse. They should be systematically designing the EU's values into all PPD dialogues and their outcomes.

Observation of the themes and the general trajectory of PPD suggests that China, unlike the EU side, views the dialogues very strategically. For example, cultural dialogues are skewed towards cultural and creative industries (an economic interest) and educational exchanges designed to give Chinese nationals access to world class universities in Europe.¹⁰⁵ Additional key examples of discourse 1 from pillar 2 and 3 dialogues can be seen in Table 6.2 below. Extended examples are presented in Appendix iii.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 24.02.2017 at 3.00pm, in Brussels.

Table 6.2 Additional key examples of discourse 1 from Pillar 2 and 3 dialogues

Commission Directorate (General)/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
DG Energy (ENER) [BRU]	<p>1. “Part of the agenda is definitely issues like human rights, like sustainable development but it’s not that... [explicit], we don’t discuss it all the time, [it’s] in the strategies it’s in our minds it’s, in the back of our heads. It’s definitely in, but then it really depends on which dialogue you are [working with], so the higher values are there, I mean are really there”.¹⁰⁶</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alludes to a lack of systematic mainstreaming in dialogues “we don’t discuss it all the time”. • Suggests EU values are being promoted inherently due to their inclusion in the EU’s strategic documents and their personal belief in them (“definitely” in “our minds ...in the back of our heads”). • EU values are thus portrayed as operating in the background and passively impacting exchanges. • Example also displays discourse 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The interviewee infers that value mainstreaming is dependent on the policy sector in question (“it really depends on which dialogue you are [working with]”). ▪ They also imply that there are isolated sectors wherein the EU values are particularly applicable (i.e. “the higher values are there, I mean are really there”).

¹⁰⁶ Interview with an official from DG ENER on 15.02.2017 at 10.00pm, in Brussels.

<p>DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL) [BRU]</p>	<p>2. The interviewee described how human rights was “not really explicitly” included in their dialogue, despite their “aware[ness] that these elements, that these issues have spill over into human rights”.</p> <p>In addition, the interviewee later remarked that human rights represented an “idealistic” dimension of their sector, while addressing technical/material issues like China’s market sustainability and overcapacity, represented the “realistic” dimension.¹⁰⁷</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview overtly suggests they are not systematically mainstreaming human rights into their dialogues because it implicit in the sectoral substance being discussed. • Despite recognising the relevance of human rights to the dialogue, they are not actively integrating based on the rationale of the discourse (“these issues have spill over into human rights”) • Example also displays discourses 3, 4 and 5 in suggesting that value promotion is an “idealistic” pursuit unlikely to engender meaningful outcomes, while the pursuit of “realistic” EU material interests will do so. • The language alludes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A perception that value is promotion is likely to antagonise the Chinese side (discourse 3) ▪ A view that Chinese counterparts will not be able to impact Chinese policy connected to controversial EU values (discourse 4) ▪ The pessimism associated with <i>China not listening to the EU and it should be</i> (discourse 5)
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¹⁰⁷ Interview with an official from DG EMPL on 03.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

<p>DG Education and Culture (EAC) [BRU]</p>	<p>3. The interview described how they are not systematically mainstream values:</p> <p>“Except if we consider that in the artistic freedom... freedom of expression, is one of those values in human rights... but we do [that] in a... indirect way, I mean, we are not going to talk about Ai Weiwei... we don’t do it. We recall the principles of our cultural engagement... that we do, but... there is no offensive ...[to] actually take on... human rights infringements”¹⁰⁸</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly suggests that human rights is not being systematically integrated into their dialogue (“we don’t do it”). • This is emphasised by interviewee having to identify a human rights dimension on the spot (i.e. “artistic freedom” a subcomponent of freedom of expression). • Suggests a lack of background discussion dedicated to mainstreaming normative dimensions to EU-China cultural dialogues • This is reaffirmed by the interviewee equating systematic mainstreaming of human rights to raising the controversial individual case of Ai Weiwei, as opposed to a multidimensional activity encompassing more subtle approaches. • For example, dialogues could address less controversial areas of mutual interest, like the role of women and people with disabilities in cultural and creative industries. • Discourse 1 also displayed by suggestion that systematic mainstreaming is not required according to the rationale of discourse 1 (“we do [that] in a... indirect way ... we recall the principles of our cultural engagement”). • Example also displays discourse 3 with value mainstreaming cast as a negative activity likely to cause conflict (“there is no offensive ...[to] actually take on... human rights infringements”).
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¹⁰⁸ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 17.06.2015 at 5.00pm, in Brussels.

EEAS coordination and Pillar 1 Political dialogues

Discourse 1 was also identifiable in the accounts of EEAS diplomats, which operationalise Pillar 1 dialogues and coordinate all others. For example, one Beijing-based diplomat described how “values are built into our conscience ...there are not rational decisions to politicise certain areas” and that any engagement with China on areas such as climate change and development was inherently normative in nature.¹⁰⁹

The language explicitly displays discourse 1 and strongly approximates the analysed Commission examples. The interviewee suggests that values implicitly inform all EU activities and thus require no further efforts to realise, by virtue of a) the normative basis of the EU’s external action and b) EU officials believing in these values (“values are built into our conscience”). The implied lack of systematic mainstreaming is also overtly confirmed by the notion that there are no “rational decisions” to integrate EU values. Additionally, the characterisation of value mainstreaming “politicising” exchanges alludes to discourse 3, wherein concern over China’s negative response to discussing controversial values, acts as a deterrent to mainstreaming by officials.

As a product of their coordinating role, EEAS diplomats sharing discourse 1, appeared to inform them enabling or actively reproducing the discourse amongst their Commission colleagues. A particularly strong example could be seen in the account of a diplomat coordinating EU-China economic dialogues. They described how:

¹⁰⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.05.2017 at 12.00pm, in Beijing.

That's ...our role, to think of it from that [normative] angle, but they [Commission officials] [don't]...For instance, non-discrimination. You may be discussing industrial standards, but if there's a standard that's discriminatorily applied to foreign operators, the non-discrimination principle is going to come up and it's going to be present in the discussions with China, even if we haven't [asked Commission officials to raise it] ...I think that's the power of it, that, we, because of where we come from, because they're part of our culture and our approach to the issues, they [values] just happen naturally in our discussions with other countries. Partly because they [values] are embedded in our regulations, partly because they're embedded in our culture, they do come up.¹¹⁰

The interviewee displays discourse 1 through suggesting that their Commission colleagues will inherently promote EU values - as well as interests - in the dialogues ("they just happen naturally in our discussions with other countries"). Characteristic of the discourse, they also suggest that this de-facto inclusion of values derives from Commission officials believing in these values ("where we come from, because they're part of our culture and our approach to the issues") and them being pre-designed into sectoral policy documents. Through validating the notion that their Commission colleagues are sufficiently promoting EU values through their activities on an inherent basis, the example displays how EEAS diplomats may be enabling or actively reproducing the discourse through their coordination activities.

Moreover, the example given by the interviewee displays a conflation between EU interests and values. The non-discrimination principle cited by the interviewee appears to refer to discrimination against EU businesses in the Chinese market (an infraction of WTO norms and EU economic values),¹¹¹ as opposed to a question of discrimination in a human rights context, encompassed by NPE and Article 21 (i.e. discrimination against minorities or women). It could be argued that this apparent confusion highlights the extent to which systematic value mainstreaming is not taking place in practice: these issues may be seldom discussed during the planning and design of EU-China dialogues. The above example also notably displays discourse 2 in suggesting that value mainstreaming

¹¹⁰ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

¹¹¹ EU (WTO) liberal economic values are based on the same philosophical basis as liberal political/individual values. They are the economic expression of individual freedom/equality (at least in theory).

represents the sole responsibility of the EEAS in EU-China dialogues (“That’s ...our role, to think of it from that angle”).

Finally, a diplomat involved with the Legal Affairs Dialogue (LAD) appeared to reaffirm how the EEAS enables or actively reproduces discourse 1 in practice. They rejected the notion that EU values needed to be systematically mainstreamed into the LAD and described how the themes of e-commerce and consumer protection, chosen for the inaugural instalment in 2016, were “values in abstract... [they are] very practical [and] bring benefits to EU citizens”.¹¹² The suggestion that EU values are being adequately shared in the LAD because of their passive connection to the themes being discussed - which most explicitly connect to EU material interests - displays discourse 1.

The interviewees’ language also implies that because the discussion of these themes with China will be beneficial to “EU citizens”, they meet EU values. In this sense, discourse 1 underpins a perception that pursuing EU material interests, meets EU values in parallel and no independent value mainstreaming activities are necessary. Lastly, the interviewee makes an interesting distinction between the technical themes being “practical” and value promotion being “abstract”. The language mirrors the DG CLIMA example and its suggestion that EU values are being passively shared through dialogues at an abstract *meta-level* and thus requiring no purposeful actions to realise. However, the language can also be connected to discourse 3 and the perception that value mainstreaming will likely undermine dialogues (i.e. be impractical).

Crucially, the above example also suggests that EEAS officials, like their Commission colleagues are not systematically mainstreaming human rights or (even rule of law) through the LAD, according to the rationale of discourse 1. This reinforces the notion that the discourse is impeding the dialogue in meeting its potential as an effective channel for indirectly promoting human rights. Arguably, if the value was systematically designed into exchanges, informing the choice of themes with the Chinese side, the dialogue would have greater capacity to promote the value.

Lastly, it is worth highlighting that discourse 1 did not appear to be shared by those EEAS diplomats involved with EU-China human rights promotion. This is unsurprising, as these individuals’ portfolios inform the active coordination and implementation human rights,

¹¹² Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 08.06.2017 4.00pm, in Beijing.

precluding any question of *inherent* activities. An additional example displaying EEAS diplomats sharing discourse 1 can be seen in Table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3 Additional key example of discourse 1 from EEAS diplomats

EEAS Directorate/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	1. “It’s not as if in every dialogue human rights is featured... the values are embedded... it’s not as if we have to think of Article 21” ¹¹³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implies that systematic mainstreaming practices is not taking place according to the rationale of discourse 1. • This is reflected in the notion that they do not “have to think of Article 21” in EU-China dialogues and that values are implicit in dialogue (“embedded”)

¹¹³ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 08.06.2017 4.00pm, in Beijing.

6.4.2 Discourse 2: EU values not relevant to all policy sectors

Discourse 2 was also identifiable across all EU-China dialogues and in the accounts of both Brussels-based and Beijing-based officials. The discourse captures officials' legitimising a lack of systematic value mainstreaming according to the rationale that such activities are *not relevant to their policy sector and instead the responsibility of designated individuals/dialogues*. While *silos* are common in any organisation, a division of labour with value mainstreaming contravenes the prescriptions of the official discourse found in documents and the aligning ideal-type of NPE. Additionally, akin to discourse 1, discourse 2 informs EU values not being systematically tabled in EU-China dialogues and thus arguably supports Chinese as opposed to EU interests, in ensuring that these issues are raised as infrequently as possible.

Pillars 2 & 3

Concerning Pillar 2 dialogues, a key example of discourse 2 was identifiable in the account of a Beijing-based DG TRADE official. The interviewee noted how their focus was on meeting EU economic interests with China in trade dialogues and their activities were underpinned by a normative "toolkit" derived predominantly from the WTO, as opposed to the EU's Article 21. They cast this as a "different enforcement system" to their colleagues from the EEAS.¹¹⁴

Displaying discourse 2, the language overtly suggests that the interviewee is not systematically mainstreaming EU values - as defined by Article 21/NPE - on the basis that such activities are not applicable to EU-China trade dialogues. Instead they are cast as the exclusive responsibility of the EEAS. This division of labour is justified by the interviewee according to the argument that DG TRADE's engagement with China is informed by alternative rules/standards to the EEAS, connected to EU material interests and economic values (i.e. a WTO "toolkit" which reflects a "different enforcement system").

These inferences were further supported elsewhere in the interviewee's account, as they clarified their objectives in trade dialogues. In response to being questioned about the

¹¹⁴ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

extent to which EU values practically featured in their dialogues, they noted that their “mission” was “to open markets... to solve problems” as well as “be practical...[and] change the situation”. The language reaffirms the rationale of discourse 2, that EU-China trade dialogues are concerned solely with meeting EU economic objectives (their “mission”) and the Article 21/NPE values are not applicable. This was reinforced by the interviewee later describing how, in the context of addressing cybersecurity concerns with China, the value dimensions of the issue, specifically human rights dimensions, were “not my mission”.

The language also suggests that meeting EU economic interests is a “practical” pursuit which will have concrete outcomes (“change the situation” and “solve problems”). This implies a perception that value mainstreaming is *impractical* and that the pursuit of such activities will leave the EU’s pressing economic objectives unsolved. It also arguably connects to concerns about dialogues being torpedoed by China when such issues are raised (discourse 3); counterparts being unable to impact Chinese policy on these issues (discourse 4) and; a pessimism that China will never accept the EU interpretation of controversial values (discourse 5).

A similar division of labour, in keeping with discourse 2, was inferred by another official from DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW). They noted that:

To tell you the truth, we have not gone into the depth of this in our dialogues ...there is a recent dialogue on rule of law [legal affairs] ...and here, you know, all of us DG's could be putting things in the agenda [of the dialogue] and try to change [China], basically because it's not abstract, it's how we operate in a hundred things, no? So, I think it's a good idea to talk about it and let's see how much we can feed it.

Interviewer: So that would be your channel, that would be your instrument when it comes to [integrating EU values]?

That would be the channel yes, I don't have anything in the current... architecture of our relations... [i.e. the promotion of rule of law is not applicable to any dialogues the interview is working with].¹¹⁵

Here, the interviewee explicitly suggests that rule of law is not relevant to their dialogue (“I don't have anything in the current... architecture of our relations”) and it is not being systematically mainstreamed as a result (“we have not gone into the depth of this in our dialogues”). This is reaffirmed by their admission that the value has not featured prominently or even explicitly in industrial dialogues to date (“we have not gone into the depth of this in our dialogues”) and that they (“think it's a good idea to talk about it”), implying that they are not doing so already.

Building on this, they suggest that the Legal Affairs Dialogue (LAD) represents a uniquely plausible channel for promoting rule of law in EU-China relations (“that would be the channel”), which all Commission officials should be contributing. Arguably, the implication is that discourse 2 is widely shared and that with the establishment of this “recent dialogue on rule of law”, Commission officials can now outsource all rule of law related issues, which have not been getting raised with China (“all of us DG's could be putting things in the agenda and try to change [China]”).

Again, this implied division of labour is strongly at odds with the systematic value mainstreaming in *all* EU-China dialogues promoted by the official discourse found in documents. Discourse 2 is also reaffirmed by the interviewee suggesting that rule of law is “not abstract”, alluding to a perception that many EU values lack applicability to sectors

¹¹⁵ Interview with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

focusing on very technical issues connected to EU material interests (like industrial cooperation).

Ironically, officials operationalising the LAD - portrayed above as uniquely normative channel - also invoked discourse 2. For example, one DG JUST official noted that:

I think the Chinese had a fair point, we already have this human rights dialogue and it's not ours and you can make your own judgements from what other people say about it...but if we start a separate dialogue which is called rule of law and we take the kind of liberal definition of it, then you're duplicating something which is already there and not producing so much good.¹¹⁶

The interviewee suggests that they are not mainstreaming rule of law and human rights because they are already covered by the EU-China human rights dialogue, managed by the EEAS, thus reflecting needless duplication ("if we start a separate dialogue which is called rule of law and we take the kind of liberal definition of it, then your duplicating something"). Notably, the interviewee also alludes to how the Chinese side has pushed to keep rule of law and human rights *off the table* during the design of the LAD, reinforcing the notion that discourse 2 supports Chinese interests.

The above example also supports the argument that the organisational discourses are limiting the potential of the of the LAD to indirectly promote human rights (and rule of law) with China. Additionally, when coupled with the DG GROW example above, it appears that the dialogue is being viewed by Commission officials as an isolated channel for compartmentalising rule of law promotion in EU-China dialogues. However, it is not performing this function in a systematic fashion.

Bolstering the above analysis, interesting examples of the discourse were also identifiable in the accounts of officials connected to the interrelated climate/environment/energy sectors. In this vein, a DG Environment (ENV) official described how value mainstreaming was "in principle, a role for the EEAS".¹¹⁷ Similarly, they elaborated that their cooperation with the Chinese side was "very successful" as a "technical discussion".

Here, the language overtly reflects discourse 2 in suggesting that EU-China environmental dialogues are restricted to technical discussion(s) and EU values are not applicable,

¹¹⁶ Interview with an official from DG JUST on 09.02.2017 at 10.30am, in Brussels.

¹¹⁷ Interview with an official from DG ENV on 08.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

instead being the responsibility of the EEAS, in EU-China political dialogues. Moreover, mirroring previous examples, the interviewee's language also alludes to the prevalence and power of the discourse in suggesting that the implied division of labour is a matter of "principle". This was reaffirmed by the interviewee later adding that the lack of values in EU-China environmental cooperation was due to "the nature of the policy", as if EU values inherently did not apply to EU-China environmental cooperation.

The interviewee's language can also be seen to reflect discourse 3 as they imply that value mainstreaming would undermine their dialogues with China, fostering unsuccessful outcomes (i.e. it's "very successful" as a "technical discussion"). An additional example in Table 6.4 displays a DG CLIMA official similarly delegating responsibility for value mainstreaming to the EEAS and like their DG GROW colleague, also to DG JUST via the LAD.

This commonality between the examples reaffirms the shared nature of the discourse and the somewhat ironic dynamics where Commission officials side-line rule of law based on the premise that their DG JUST colleagues will raise it, when these individuals are in turn shifting responsibility for value mainstreaming to the EEAS.

Interestingly, officials from these sectors did not appear to consider the promotion of *sustainable development* as relevant to their dialogues with China, despite the connection between the environmental dimension of the value and the sectoral substance. In this respect, one official from DG Climate Action stated that "we are not seeing it [sustainable development] as a value point". When asked whether other EU values like human rights featured in climate change dialogues, they stated, "not at all frankly".¹¹⁸

Similarly, a DG ENV official noted that they "just discussed environmental issues",¹¹⁹ as opposed to EU values, while a DG Energy (ENER) official described how "environment or even social, labour standards, they[re] always mentioned" in the context of non-normative "technical substance" of EU-China energy dialogues.¹²⁰

These examples can be seen to strongly reflect discourse 2, with the officials explicitly suggesting that sustainable development, along with all other EU values, are not applicable to their dialogues with China. However, their language also displays that much

¹¹⁸ Interview with an official from DG CLIMA on 16.02.2017 at 9.30am, in Brussels.

¹¹⁹ Interview with an official from DG ENV on 08.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

¹²⁰ Interview with an official from DG ENER on 15.02.2017 at 10.00pm, in Brussels.

of the substance of these dialogue (e.g. environmental issues or climate negotiations) would nevertheless fall under the environmental dimension of sustainable development. As a result, mainstreaming sustainable development appears to be taking place, but not as a product of systematic activities by officials to *share a value* with China. Instead, mainstreaming is sporadically taking place, without officials necessarily aware of it, informed by values being pre-built into guiding policy documents which dictate the substance.

Crucially, as hinted at in the DG ENER example, these dynamics seem to apply to mainstreaming other EU values too, with social/labour standards connecting to human rights promotion. These activities are arguably explained through the concept of *partial mainstreaming*, addressed in in Chapter 9. These activities display how EU values do underpin EU-China dialogues in practice, but they poorly compensate for the systematic actions prescribed by the official discourse in documents and are thus unable to fully realise the ideal-type of NPE. Additional key examples of discourse 2 from Pillars 2 and 3 are presented in Table 6.4 below. An extended table can be found Appendix iii.

Table 6.4 Additional key examples of discourse 2 from Pillar 2 and 3 dialogues

EEAS Directorate/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
DG Justice and Consumers (JUST) [BRU]	1. “It’s a kind of natural instinct to say, ‘well we have our dialogue why do we need to invest time in something else which is run by someone else’”. ¹²¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Displays the power of discourse 2 with interviewee suggesting that it is a “natural instinct” to side-line human rights because it is dealt with in another dialogue (“which is run by someone else”).
DG Justice and Consumers (JUST) [BRU]	2. “It evolved ...we would think of four subjects... and they [the Chinese side] said: ‘well they’re all okish, but in particular we like regulations, that’s our number one’, and then we saw the development for legal codes, we said ‘ok, can we discuss that and they said ... ‘we’d prefer better regulation’ and then we said ‘ok we’ll do both’. So it’s just a discussion”. ¹²²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggests that the process for choosing the dialogue’s themes does not include any systematic attempt to include EU values (“it kind of evolved” ...it’s just a discussion”). Situation portrayed where both sides pragmatically lobby for the most desirable themes, dynamics arguably informed by both organisational discourses. No suggestion that the EU side is pushing for themes with a human rights dimension and instead happy to accommodate China’s preferences (which avoid EU values and focus on technical areas). Without systematic processes to incorporate values on the EU side, dialogues will arguably gravitate towards technical issues which are non-controversial and mutually palatable – reflected in the agreed themes in the quote.

¹²¹ Interview with an official from DG JUST on 01.03.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

¹²² Interview with an official from DG JUST on 11.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels

EU Delegation to China, Information Society Media Section [BEI]	3. Official described how one of their colleagues working with human rights in the EEAS “does exactly the same as I do”, but with “a different checklist”, before they described how more broadly “we have a division of labour” with the EEAS (in terms of norm promotion) and that human rights promotion was “not my portfolio”. ¹²³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that they are not systematically mainstreaming human rights in dialogues since it is inapplicable to their sector (“not my portfolio”) and instead the responsibility of the EEAS (“we have a division of labour”). • Mirrors in-text DG Trade example through inferring that they are bound by alternative, sector-specific standards which depart from those informing their EEAS colleagues (“a different checklist”).
EU Delegation to China, Information Society Media Section [BEI]	<p>4. “What is explicitly mentioned in the treaties [in terms of Article 21] does not enter into my job”.</p> <p>5. “These things don’t really enter the work here”.¹²⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quote 4 infers that Article 21/NPE values are not applicable to their dialogues. • Reaffirmed by quote 5 suggesting that that systematic mainstreaming is not taking place in their dialogue.
DG Climate Action (CLIMA) [BRU]	6. Official described how EU values were “much more discussed” in the dialogues managed by their colleagues in the EEAS and DG Justice and Consumers (JUST), before adding that “obviously we are not doing that”. ¹²⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes how EU values are the isolated responsibility of their colleagues in the EEAS and DG JUST and not relevant to their dialogue. • Displays the power of discourse 2, implying the rationale is natural/implicit (“obviously we are not doing that”).

¹²³ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ Interview with an official from DG CLIMA on 16.02.2017 at 9.30am, in Brussels.

<p>DG Education and Culture (EAC) [BEI]</p>	<p>7. “Rule of law or on human rights ...I don’t really deal with this, so I feel it is best to ask [name of the human rights desk at the delegation] who is, or whoever you know [from the EEAS]”.</p> <p>8. “We did mention ...the NGO law but of course from the perspective of the impact that might only have academic cooperation I mean all the other perspectives, all the other NGOs, as I say, I don’t deal with that”.¹²⁶</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quote 7: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rule of law and human rights portrayed as not relevant to their sector (“I don’t really deal with this”). ▪ Interviewee reinforces this explicit portrayal of discourse 2 by suggesting author should ask the EEAs about value mainstreaming. ▪ EEAS, implied to have exclusive responsibility for values in EU-China dialogues • Quote 8: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reaffirms discourse 2 through suggestion that China’s NGO law was narrowly approached on the basis of concerns over future academic cooperation. ▪ Suggests they eschewed the law’s significant human rights implications as it was not their responsibility (“all the other perspectives ...as I say, I don’t deal with that”).
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¹²⁶ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 22.05.2017 at 12.30pm, in Beijing

EEAS coordination and Pillar 1 Political dialogues

EEAS diplomats could be seen to confirm the existence of discourse 2 amongst their Commission colleagues (See Table 6.5, quote 1). However, as in the case of discourse 1, the analysis suggested that they shared, and thus de-facto enabled/reproduced discourse 2 through their coordination activities. Displaying this, a Beijing-based diplomat involved with the LAD described how:

We have to separate this from the human rights dialogue... keep the issues separate unless they ask ...If you already have a dialogue on human rights, why do you need another?¹²⁷

Closely approximating the language of their Commission colleagues, the interviewee suggests that human rights is not applicable to their dialogue because it is already addressed in the human rights dialogue. Additionally, they fascinatingly imply that it will be determined by the Chinese side whether human rights will be integrated into the exchange (“keep the issues separate unless they ask”). This reflects an unlikely prospect given China’s desire to avoid human rights being tabled. It again highlights how discourse 2 is serving to support China’s interests in suppressing discussion of values in EU-China dialogues. The quote also reaffirms how systematic human rights mainstreaming is not taking place through the LAD, limiting its potential as an indirect channel for promoting the value.

The above interviewee also invoked discourse 2 as a justification for not mainstreaming the environmental facet of sustainable development into future LADs - e.g. pursuing the theme of environmental governance. They stated that “it makes no sense to raise sustainable development” in the dialogues without the “relevant Commission experts ...I don’t expect my colleagues from DG Justice to speak about sustainable development”.¹²⁸ Here, the interviewee suggests that because DG JUST officials do not have the portfolios that most closely connect to sustainable development (they are not the “relevant Commission experts”), they should not be addressing it with the Chinese side in practice (“it makes no sense to raise sustainable development”).

¹²⁷ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 08.06.2017 4.00pm, in Beijing.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

The interviewee also highlights how they are not encouraging value mainstreaming amongst their Commission colleagues on this basis (“I don’t expect my colleagues from DG Justice to speak about sustainable development”). They also allude to the self-evident logic and thus power of discourse 2 (i.e. “it makes no sense). Reflecting this, the LAD can be seen to holistically eschew systematic value mainstreaming (i.e. not just human rights and rule of law) based on discourse 2.

In a related example, an EEAS diplomat involved with human rights promotion expressed discourse 2 in describing how the human rights dialogue reflected the “evil twin” of the LAD, which they cast as the “nice twin”, adding that “one is the confrontation, one is the coordination ... [and that there was] not an overlap on purpose”.¹²⁹ Again, the implication is that human rights mainstreaming is not applicable to the dialogue and the EEAS is enabling or actively reproducing this separation amongst their Commission colleagues.

The interviewee also arguably invokes discourse 3, with the language framing human rights mainstreaming as a negative activity which will provoke obstructive responses from the Chinese side (i.e. the notion of an “evil twin” and value mainstreaming reflecting “confrontation”). This example is particularly poignant, as it suggests that discourse 2 may be shared by the officials working with human rights, where promotion of systematic value mainstreaming would be most expected. In this sense, while the analysis in section 6.4.1 indicated that diplomats with a human rights portfolio did not share discourse 1 (values are implicit to EU-China dialogues) they did appear to share discourse 2 and the selective mainstreaming practices it promotes, which depart from the official discourse found in documents.

In a final key example, an EEAS diplomat involved with coordinating EU-China climate change cooperation described how the environmental dimension of sustainable development (and by-proxy EU values more broadly), were not appearing in climate change dialogues:

¹²⁹ Interview with a diplomat from EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

If you look at DG CLIMA, the culture of DG CLIMA, they are not diplomats ...they are more... experts. And so experts work as experts very well. And DG CLIMA people may not be aware [about the value dimensions] - and its normal, it's not a criticism, it's just how it works everywhere - that we have difficulties on trade, difficulties on property rights respect, with China. So we probably work in silos ourselves and the role of the EEAS as much as possible, is to try to have the whole picture and then not having some contradictions in our policies... with China.¹³⁰

Like their Beijing-based EEAS colleague involved with the LAD, they infer that value mainstreaming is dependent on the expertise of the official. In this case, the suggestion is that as experts on climate change value mainstreaming is inapplicable for them. Additionally, the interviewee suggests that they accept, and by-proxy enable or actively reproduce this inferred division of labour among their Commission officials, in line with discourse 2 ("experts work as experts very well ...we probably work in silos ourselves and the role of the EEAS as much as possible, is to try to have the whole picture"). In this fashion, they are validating behaviour at odds with the systematic value mainstreaming in all dialogues prescribed by the official discourse found in documents.

Mirroring past examples, the language also alludes to the prevalence and power of discourse 2, suggesting that its prescriptions are natural and widely accepted ("its normal, it's not a criticism, it's just how it works everywhere"). Similarly, they suggest that every sectoral dialogue is ostensibly too busy with sector-specific challenges with China to mainstream values ("we have difficulties on trade, difficulties on property rights"). Additional key examples can be seen in table 6.5 below and extended examples are presented in Appendix iii.

¹³⁰ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.03.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

Table 6.5 Additional key examples of discourse 2 from EEAS diplomats

EEAS Directorate/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
GLOBAL Directorate	1. "It's [human rights mainstreaming] not always done at more junior officials' level... Where people consider that they have only one file, it's only this file." ¹³¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Displays confirmation by an EEAS diplomat that their Commission colleagues often eschew human rights mainstreaming on the basis that it is not applicable to their dialogues ("they have only one file, it's only this file").
GLOBAL Directorate	2. "I would say it's very... technical and isolated from the human rights discussion... when your speaking about climate policy, you're speaking about big instruments like ETS [Emissions Trading Scheme], you're not speaking about conditions of work, of the worker, how much they... when you are talking about energy efficiency, it's the same... so you really don't get into the more political and human dimension." ¹³²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforces that discourse 2 is shared and by-proxy enabled/reproduced by EEAS diplomats amongst their Commission colleagues. Language infers that human rights mainstreaming is not applicable to EU-China climate change cooperation due ("it's very... technical and isolated from the human rights discussion"). Also implied that Moreover, it is implied that the scale and complexity of climate change cooperation is such that officials are too busy for value mainstreaming ("you're speaking about big instruments like ETS ...so you really don't get into the more political and human dimension".). Portrayal of human rights as a political dimension invokes discourse 3, with the issue framed as a controversial "political" issue likely to create tensions.

¹³¹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

¹³² Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.03.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	<p>3. When asked about the extent to which human rights was featuring in EU-China environment/climate/energy dialogues, the interviewee described how “we have the human rights dialogue [for that]”. They added that the dialogue represented “an instrument, better for that purpose” and that you have to “use your instrument carefully depending on the context”.¹³³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that human rights mainstreaming is not applicable/the responsibility of Commission officials operationalising climate/environment/energy dialogues. • Discourse 2 also invoked for EU-China dialogues more broadly with suggestion that value mainstreaming is limited to specific dialogues (i.e. you have to “use your instrument carefully depending on the context”). • Reinforces role of EEAS in enabling or actively reproducing the discourse.
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	<p>4. How shall I put it... there is also I suspect increasing resistance on our side you know, coming from quarters, in particularly, when it comes to trade and investment ...you have people who can be very dogmatic about trade and they almost see trade as a pure... policy.¹³⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alludes to the existence of discourse 2 amongst their Commission colleagues managing EU-China trade and investment dialogues. • Suggests these officials believe that their dialogues should be restricted to economic issues with China (“you have people who ...see trade as a pure... policy”). • Power/prevalence of discourse 2 captured by suggestion that these individuals are “very dogmatic”. • Invokes discourse 3 in suggesting that DG TRADE officials seek to keep their dialogues “pure” i.e. detached from controversial EU values likely to create tension.

¹³³ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 20.02.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

¹³⁴ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

6.4.3 The EU's 2016 China Strategy

Analysis of the China-country supplement of the EU's 2016 Global strategy, *Elements for a new strategy on China (2016)*, suggested that the document may also be enabling or actively reproducing discourse 2 amongst EU officials. The strategy displays pragmatic language which appears to depart from the official discourse.

It describes how the "EU needs its own strategy, one which puts its *own interests* at the forefront in the new relationship" [emphasis added] (EU, 2016ii:5) along with promoting "universal values". Building on this, it notes that "the EU's engagement with China should be principled, practical and pragmatic, staying true to its interests and values" (*ibid.*). While, as described in Chapter 2, EU values and interests overlap, the language arguably alludes to a distinction between EU material interests and the Article 21/NPE values, placing emphasis on the former ("practical and pragmatic").

On the surface, the document appears to reaffirm the official discourse, paraphrasing Article 21 (*ibid.*) and promoting the "mainstreaming [of] key themes and objectives across all EU-China dialogues" (*ibid.* p. 19). However, the latter statement encompasses the mainstreaming EU material interests, while such prescriptions are broadly qualified with the suggestion of "concentrating resources on a smaller number of priorities where the EU has the greatest added value" (*ibid.*). The document also importantly omits any stipulation of *systematic value mainstreaming* in dialogues.

Taken together with quotes above can be seen to enable and reproduce discourse 2. The language alludes to a "practical and pragmatic" approach to EU-China dialogues, validating officials focusing exclusively on the sector-specific substance most likely to have successful outcomes, while side-lining the Article 21/NPE values. The suggestion of EU interests being at the "forefront" of the relationship, may also be serving to permit such activities justified by discourse 2.

Displaying this argued *enabling role* of the EU's 2016 China strategy, one DG TRADE official described how: "I do what I can in the most efficient [way]" and it is "not *practical* or *pragmatic* [emphasis added]" to seek to raise value-related issues in all channels and "talk about my baggage in every situation".¹³⁵ The interviewee appears to paraphrase the

¹³⁵ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

document to support their invocation of discourse 2. They suggest that value mainstreaming would not be appropriate for their dialogues, reflecting an inefficient use of time and resources compared to a narrow focus on trade issues.

The official also suggests that their position is informed by a negative framing of value mainstreaming. They cast such activities as controversial, tactless and most effectively dealt with in the right setting, like the human rights dialogue (i.e. I wouldn't "talk about my baggage in every situation"). This portrayal of value mainstreaming, in keeping with discourse 3, is reinforced by the image of "baggage", akin to the idea of emotional baggage. The interviewee infers that EU officials could undermine their dialogue if they do not consciously ensure that their values are kept separated from the exchange.

As a caveat to this argued enabling/reproducing role of the EU's 2016 China strategy, it is important to highlight the context of the document, which supplements the Global Strategy (2016). As articulated in the latter document, which displays similarly pragmatic language emphasising *EU interests*, the documents were produced at a time when the EU was facing numerous existential threats. These included potential disintegration following Brexit, the migration crisis and continued Eurozone instability. Nevertheless, the Global Strategy places greater emphasis on promoting EU values than the China strategy. It specifies the need for "systematically mainstreaming human rights across policy sectors" (EU, 2016i) in line with the established official discourse on value mainstreaming.

Reflecting this, the alignment between the language found in the China strategy and the discourses invoked by officials operationalising EU-China dialogues is potentially significant. The connection between the document's language and discourses invoked by officials may be partly explained by these officials having been consulted or even contributed to the strategy. Either way, the document appears more representative of the state of the EU's normative power in practice with China than the practices prescribed by the official discourse on value mainstreaming.

6.5 Lack of systematic value mainstreaming in Internal EU coordination meeting mechanisms

Finally, reinforcing conclusions throughout this chapter that the EEAS shares and thus de-facto enables or reproduces the organisational discourses, interviewees revealed that systematic value mainstreaming was not being coordinated through the internal coordination meeting mechanisms in Brussels and Beijing, overwhelmingly managed by the EEAS.

Brussels: The China Country Team

In Brussels, the EEAS chairs a (non-compulsory) meeting for all Commission China desks called the *China Country Team* (CCT), which typically takes place every two months and for up to half a day.¹³⁶ Brussels-based interviewees unanimously described how discussion of EU values in these meetings was rare and discussion of value mainstreaming strategies for individual sectors unheard of. Instead, the agenda was dedicated to basic strategic coordination across EU-China dialogues, commonly framed by officials as an “exchange of information”.¹³⁷

Meetings encompassed elements such as establishing common positions on prominent issues and current events impacting the bilateral relationship¹³⁸, a “de-brief”¹³⁹ following summits/key dialogues and video-link communication with the delegation in Beijing.¹⁴⁰ It also emerged that meetings could be *themed* to specific sectors.¹⁴¹ For example, one interviewee described how one meeting focused on DG JUST officials “talking about the future [EU-China] legal affairs dialogue ...[and] consumer issues”,¹⁴² while others described sessions dedicated to the 2018 EU-China Year of Tourism and industrial policy.¹⁴³

¹³⁶ Interview with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm. Interviewers with EEAS diplomats on 10.04.2015 at 3.30pm; 09.03.2017 at 10.00am; 05.10.2017 at 11.00am. All in Brussels.

¹³⁷ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 17.06.2015 at 5.00pm, in Brussels.

¹³⁸ Interviews with EEAS diplomats on 20.02.2017 at 11.00am; 23.03.2017 at 11.00am; 05.10.2017 at 11.00am and 10.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

¹³⁹ Interview with an official from DG JUST on 09.02.2017 at 10.30am, in Brussels.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 10.02.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*

¹⁴² Interview with an official from DG JUST on 09.02.2017 at 10.30am, in Brussels.

¹⁴³ Interviews with officials from DG EAC on 10.02.2017 at 10.00am and DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

Interviewees' accounts provided greater insight into the lack of coordination of systematic value mainstreaming in CCT meetings. For example, when asked about whether value dimensions of individual sectors were raised in the CCT meetings, a DG ENV official stated that "not really, I don't think there is such". They added that the CCT was "basically like a debrief – the EEAS gets an understanding of who is doing what, [to] get an understanding in the sectoral fields".¹⁴⁴ The interviewee's language explicitly reinforces both the lack of any substance discussing EU values and the broad *exchange of information* format of the meetings. In another key example, one DG EAC official noted that:

I don't think that there is specific discussion on this area, on how we transmit, convey values through our activities ...I mean, it can take place ...there are some dedicated meetings to a specific area such as the human rights [dialogue].¹⁴⁵

Again, the interviewee confirms that *systematic coordination* of value mainstreaming is not taking place. They portray discussion of values as an unusual phenomenon which is ad-hoc in nature, as opposed to an institutionalised feature of all meetings (i.e. "it can take place"). This is reinforced by the implication that human rights discussion is *compartmentalised* into dedicated sessions on the human rights dialogue ("there are some dedicated meetings to a specific area such as the human rights [dialogue]"). As this dialogue takes place once a year, it can be inferred that discussion of human rights in these meetings may also be limited to an annual basis.

This absence of explicit discussion and coordination of EU values in CCT meetings was confirmed by EEAS diplomats. For example, when asked about the role of values in meetings, one diplomat reaffirmed the broad remit of the meetings. They noted that "our job is to bring all DGs into one room" for "information exchange" and to "look for overlap... [and] areas of cooperation" as well as provide "broader context".¹⁴⁶

Conversely, they suggested that there were no systematic efforts to coordinate value mainstreaming and discussion of values would be dependent on whether "we have specific issues like the NGOs law".¹⁴⁷ Reaffirming this sporadic role of values in meetings,

¹⁴⁴ Interview with an official from DG ENV on 08.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 10.02.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 20.02.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

another diplomat described how, in the context of human rights, discussion was limited to ad-hoc “human rights updates” and a “de-brief” for the annual human rights dialogue. They portrayed these activities as “a way to remind them [the Commission DGs] of ...horizontal principles that should be in their documents”.¹⁴⁸

The language suggests that the EEAS is viewing these isolated reports on human rights issues and dialogues as a passive means of promoting human rights mainstreaming in other dialogues (“a way to remind” Commission colleagues), without any active coordination of such. Interestingly, the *human rights updates* in these meetings described by the interviewee were absent from Commission accounts entirely, emphasising both the rarity of these issues being discussed and the passive manner in which the value is featured.

Ultimately, the lack of coordination of value mainstreaming in these Brussels-based CCT meetings can be seen to depart from the official discourse found documents. In this context, the EEAS would be expected to promote systematic value mainstreaming amongst their Commission colleagues. These dynamics also arguably connect to the discourses established in this chapter.

Unlike the Beijing-based meetings described below, explicit examples displaying this linkage were rare in Brussels-based interviewee’s accounts. However, inferences can be made based on the above analysis. In this sense, a lack of discussion of values in the CCT meetings can be connected with perceptions that values are implicit to EU-China dialogues (discourse 1) and that value mainstreaming is not relevant to every dialogue (discourse 2).

Supporting this, one EEAS diplomat appeared to invoke discourse 2. They suggested that their coordinating role with Commission officials entailed ensuring that each dialogue was most effectively used to implement key policy documents.¹⁴⁹ As dialogues are primarily designed to achieve their specific sectoral objectives, this appears to enable a side-lining of values by officials.

The absence of coordination of value mainstreaming in CCT meetings can also be linked with the discourses pertaining to China’s role, described in Chapter 7. In particular, those

¹⁴⁸ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 20.02.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

discourses justifying an avoidance of such activities on the basis that they will likely antagonise the Chinese side and undermine exchanges (discourse 3), and be pointless due to counterparts being unable to impact value-related Chinese policy (discourse 4). As a result, value mainstreaming may not be getting discussed in the CCT due to a perception among EEAS diplomats that it may be counterproductive to many dialogues or their Commission colleagues will consider it such and dismiss it.

Beijing: Meetings at the EU delegation to China

Comparison between the CCT and meeting mechanisms at the Beijing delegation, further supported a connection between the discourses and a lack of coordination of value mainstreaming. In this vein, Brussels-based interviewees often argued that the format of the CCT mechanism made it inappropriate for value mainstreaming. As one DG EAC official noted, “it’s only half a day, well maximum ...there so many DG issues, so many dialogues, so it’s more of an exchange of information”.¹⁵⁰

The interviewee suggests that meetings are limited to basic coordination due to the unwieldy number of sectors and DGs managing them, coupled with the very limited time ascribed for individual meetings. Interviewees also often suggested that alternative smaller meeting mechanisms would be more appropriate for coordinating value mainstreaming, perhaps bringing together clusters of DGs working in similar sectors (i.e. GROW/TRADE/ECFIN), chaired by the relevant EEAS desk.¹⁵¹

However, the meeting mechanisms at the EU delegation to China appeared to fulfil these criteria. They were much smaller and more regular, including weekly meetings bringing together the heads of section, internal section meetings (not all chaired by the EEAS) and monthly delegation meetings attended by all staff.¹⁵² Nevertheless, despite their more manageable format, particularly those weekly formations, it emerged that much like the CCT, meetings were restricted to broad technical coordination. Similarly, values were only

¹⁵⁰ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 17.06.2015 at 5.00pm, in Brussels.

¹⁵¹ Interviews with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm and a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.03.2017 at 10.00am, both in Brussels.

¹⁵² The EU delegation to China is divided into sections which tend to reflect individual DGs (e.g. Trade and Investment Section) or clusters of DGs (Science, Technology and Environment Section). The EEAS diplomats located in the *Political, Press and Information Section*.

Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

incorporated on an ad-hoc basis, with no systematic coordination of value mainstreaming in dialogues.

As one Commission official stated, “I don’t see a lot of discussions of that kind in the internal meetings”.¹⁵³ This infers that explicit discussion of values in meetings - including sustainable development and human rights - is rare. Building on this, an EEAS diplomat described how “in a perfect world it would be great if human rights was raised in every meeting”, but discussion of the value and its promotion was “not done in a systematic way”.¹⁵⁴ The language here suggests that much like in Brussels, EEAS diplomats are not systematically incorporating human rights into meetings.

The lack of coordination of value mainstreaming in these more manageable meetings, suggests that logistical considerations are not principally informing such activities not taking place. This supports the argument that there is a deeper explanation for this neglect: the discourses shared by officials. This was reinforced by Beijing-based interviewees.

When asked about the extent to which EU values featured in internal meetings, a DG TRADE official appeared to invoke discourse 2. The interviewee described how “we think from a commercial perspective” in internal section meetings and suggested that discussion of Article 21/NPE values would not take place due to their inapplicability to trade dialogues.¹⁵⁵

Similarly, another Commission official connected to environment/energy/climate described how “there is no discussion of values. I mean people report about their work, it’s really work place ...it’s not a political discussion place”.¹⁵⁶ Again, the official expresses discourse 2 in suggesting that values are not featuring in Beijing-based meetings because they are not applicable to their own and their colleagues’ roles/dialogues (“people report about their work”). The example also appears to display discourse 3. The characterisation of values as a “political” issue, arguably supports the argument that mainstreaming may not be being discussed in meetings because officials consider such activities a threat to

¹⁵³ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.05.2017 at 12.00pm, in Beijing.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

sector-specific objectives. In effect, value mainstreaming may reflect a *taboo* topic. This appeared to be reinforced by the interviewee adding that:

People are very respectful of the others' files, so you don't tend to go and argue ...have a political argument about someone else's file.¹⁵⁷

Overall, this section has displayed how a lack of systematic mainstreaming of EU values in EU-China dialogues appears to extend to the background coordination meeting mechanisms, typically managed by the EEAS. Whilst interviewees in Brussels appeared to blame the scale and infrequency of their CCT meetings as a reason for this oversight, comparable dynamics in the smaller Beijing-based meetings suggests a linkage with the discourses justifying a lack of systematic value mainstreaming. Additional examples displaying the lack of coordination of value mainstreaming in internal meetings can be seen in Table 6.6 below.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

Table 6.6 Additional key examples displaying a lack of value mainstreaming coordination through meeting mechanisms

EU Institution	Directorate/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
European Commission	DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) [BRU]	<p>1. Interviewer: Are they [the EEAS via the CCT] saying: look how can we sort of push EU values into dialogues?</p> <p>DG GROW: I don't think so... as values. I don't think that's the way it's communicated, no.¹⁵⁸</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirms that systematic coordination of value mainstreaming in all EU-China dialogues is taking place through CCT meetings.
European Commission	Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	<p>2. Interviewer: The [EEAS] China Division Chairs the China Country team meeting and you have all the Commission Desks, but basically this is just an exchange of information. There is not effort to say right your sector rules the law and on what rights issues can you raise in your next dialogue?</p> <p>Interviewee: Exactly, it is the same [here in Beijing]. (interviewer: It's similar here?). It is more or less the same ...yes.¹⁵⁹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforces how coordination of value mainstreaming is not taking place in smaller and more frequent Beijing-based meetings. • This supports the notion that the EEAS neglecting such discussion is informed by discourses shared by officials, as opposed logistical challenges.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 22.05.2017 at 12.30pm, in Beijing.

European Commission	Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	3. "Being in a meeting with a person who is dealing with the, with human rights, then of course, from this perspective ... [human rights] are always in the background, because there is someone who just deals with it, officially deals with it and officially raises all these questions with the Chinese, etc, etc." ¹⁶⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewee confirms that coordination of human rights mainstreaming is not taking place in Beijing-based meetings. • They suggest that such activities are not necessary as someone at delegation, who attends these meetings, works with human rights. • This reflects discourse 2 and supports the argument that discourses shared by officials are informing a neglect of values in meetings.
EEAS	ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	<p>4. When asked about whether value mainstreaming was coordinated through the CCT, an EEAS diplomat stated that:</p> <p>"The China country team, because of the frequency with which it happens and because of the number of people it involves, tends to be more about... a political update on how things have moved on, [the] situation in China, bilateral relations ... opportunities to say right, does anybody have any difficulty, does anybody need help for instance ...It's that sort of, of discussion ...it's also about exchanging information and agendas" ¹⁶¹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirms that value mainstreaming is not being coordinated by EEAS via CCT meetings. • Suggests that such activities cannot be pursued through mechanism due to infrequency and large attendance.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

EEAS	ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	5. If we needed to influence the dialogue in any sort of way, I would definitely not choose a country team to do it because there's too many ...people round the table that don't have anything to do with the dialogue if that was what we wanted, I would do it in a smaller format. ¹⁶²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, confirms lack of coordination of value mainstreaming in CCT and a logistical justification by EEAS diplomats for this. • Interviewee suggests that smaller meetings would be more appropriate for such activities.
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¹⁶² *ibid.*

6.6 Conclusions

This chapter displayed how, departing from the EU's official discourse on value mainstreaming and NPE's aligning ideal-type conceptualisation, values are not being *systematically mainstreamed* into EU-China dialogues by EU officials. This superficially aligns with the criticisms of NPE that the EU's material interests take precedence over its values (See Chapter 2.6.3). However, in line with this thesis's original micro-level approach to the topic, discourse analysis of transcripts from interviews with EU officials revealed deeper explanations for these dynamics.

In this context, it emerged that officials justified an absence of systematic value mainstreaming through two discursive categories: *organisational discourses* and discourses surrounding *China's role*. This chapter focused on the former category invoked by interviewees. Discourse 1 captured how a lack of value mainstreaming was justified on the basis that such activities were implicit to EU-China dialogues and thus required no further efforts by officials. Discourse 2 justified a neglect of these practices due to a perception that value mainstreaming was not relevant to all EU-China dialogues and instead the responsibility of isolated dialogues and individuals. These discourses appeared to support Chinese, as opposed EU interests in limiting the discussion of values in EU-China dialogues.

The discourses appeared to apply equally to officials based in Brussels and Beijing, as well as in the context of both human rights and the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Regarding the former, it notably emerged that these discourses were limiting the potential of the EU-China Legal Affairs Dialogue (LAD) to promote human rights indirectly with China. Concerning sustainable development, it was revealed that officials considered the value inapplicable to their dialogues (discourse 2), despite much of the substance falling under the value. This appeared to be captured by the concept of *partial mainstreaming*, which captures how value mainstreaming takes place sporadically in dialogues, due to EU values being pre-built into dialogues. As described in Chapter 9, despite displaying how values underpin EU-China dialogues, such *partial* activities have limited scope versus systematic activities and are unable to fully realise the ideal-type of NPE.

The analysis also suggested that EEAS officials, managing pillar one dialogues and coordinating all others, shared and thus enabled or actively reproduced the organisational discourses. This appeared to extend to a lack of coordination of value mainstreaming in the internal meetings mechanisms in Brussels and Beijing, chaired by the EEAS. The chapter also suggested that the EU's 2016 China strategy may be similarly serving to enable or reproduce the discourses informing a lack of systematic value mainstreaming amongst EU officials.

Chapter 7 - Challenges to value mainstreaming II: China's role

7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the category of discourses characterising *China's role* in EU-China dialogues as a primary justification for a lack of systematic value mainstreaming. Section 7.2 examines discourse 3, which reflects arguably the dominant discourse invoked by officials. The discourse captures a perception that raising the most *controversial* values in dialogues will foster obstructive behaviour by China and undermine exchanges. The section also details how this discourse extends to the human rights dialogue and China's efforts to impede it.

Discourse 4, outlined in Section 7.3, surrounds the interlinked view on the EU side that raising EU values with China is not only risky, but pointless, as opaque Chinese counterparts will likely be unable to impact Chinese policy connected to EU values. These two discourses are arguably informed by genuinely obstructive actions and practices by the Chinese side, which act as a *deterrent* to EU mainstreaming efforts. Importantly, as China's real or expected resistance towards discussing controversial values with the EU in dialogues appears to be informed by a facet of the official party-state discourse on values (See Chapter 5.5.2), EU officials avoiding value mainstreaming in dialogues in response, could be seen to be complying with the Chinese party line and indirectly endorsing the official Chinese position on human rights. This failure to challenge China's official interpretation of values in dialogues arguably reflects an existential threat to the EU's values and their continued relevance.

Conversely, discourse 5, approached in Section 7.4, appears to be rooted in the actions of the EU side. This highly nuanced discourse surrounds a perception on the EU side that *China is not listening to the EU and it should be*. The discourse appears to inform a lack of reflexivity amongst officials which connects to unsuccessful and counterproductive approaches in the rare instances when values *are* raised with the Chinese side (particularly via the human rights dialogue). It also seems to deter value mainstreaming in all other dialogues, like discourses 3 and 4. Reinforcing the conclusions in Chapter 6, it appears that all of these discourses primarily support Chinese as opposed to EU interests in limiting the discussion of values in EU-China dialogues.

7.2 Discourse 3: The Chinese side's conduct during EU-China dialogues impedes the practical promotion of EU values

Examples of discourse 3 were identifiable across all pillars of EU-China dialogues, encompassing both EEAS and Commission officials' accounts in Brussels and Beijing. The discourse captures how officials justify not mainstreaming the *most controversial values* in EU-China dialogues on the basis that it will trigger obstructive responses by China, comprising exchanges. Discourse 3 is therefore of great relevance to this thesis's focus on human rights, but not applicable to the comparably uncontroversial environmental dimension of sustainable development.

Discourse 3 differs from the *organisational discourses* through not necessarily being based upon the first-hand experiences of EU officials. In this fashion, the discourse appears to be often informed by the experiences of those few officials who are raising controversial EU values with China, particularly EEAS diplomats involved with the human rights dialogue. As a result, China's obstructive behaviour in this dialogue, which is uniquely dedicated to promoting an EU value in EU-China relations, appears to be legitimising a lack of value mainstreaming in all others. It seems to reflect a *cautionary tale* for the consequences of pursuing such activities with China.

The discourse is also arguably informed by officials' first-hand experiences of China obstructing discussion of other issues - not connected to the Article 21/NPE values - which it does not want to discuss (e.g. reform of state-owned enterprises or overcapacity). It is also possible that China is actively contributing to the climate of fear associated with the discourse. It may be building on and perhaps embellishing a perception on the EU side that any attempts to mainstream controversial EU values will trigger obstructive behaviour. Crucially, as an avoidance of discussing controversial EU values in dialogues reflects an official party-state discourse expressed by Chinese officials, EU officials eschewing value mainstreaming based on real or expected resistance from interlocutors could be seen to represent a compliance with this *party line*. This arguably has significant implications for the EU side, neglected by seemingly complacent officials, having the potential to be perceived by observers and the Chinese side as an indirect acceptance and legitimisation of the official Chinese position on controversial values like human rights. It also importantly reflects evidence that the flow of values between the EU and China is *two-way* in nature (See Chapter 2.4), as the EU is effectively *engaging with*

and *acquiescing* to China's values. Moreover, as noted in Chapter 3.5.1, this interaction solely with the official party-state discourse on controversial EU values is coming at the expense of heavily suppressed, alternative interpretations of these values which are present in Chinese civil society (See Chapter 3.5.1).

Beyond this, it is crucial to emphasise the deeper implications of the EU being perceived to comply with and de-facto endorse China's official party-state discourse on values, illuminated by Shklar's (1989) work, which was described in Chapter 5.5.2. As the EU's values and their relevance is informed and empowered by a fear of totalitarian governments and the cruelty they enable, EU officials neglecting to confront China's conflicting values actively erodes the EU's values and their continued relevance. It represents an act of self-harm by EU officials to the EU's normative power, wherein they effectively capitulate to the very fear - and one that may be being actively cultivated by the Chinese side in dialogues - that the EU's values are designed to confront.

Pillar 2: Economic & sectoral dialogues

Concerning Pillar 2 dialogues, a key example could be seen in the account of a Beijing-based DG TRADE official. They described how "if we integrate human rights [into trade dialogues] it might antagonise" the Chinese side, while addressing a "purely business" approach will attain "more traction".¹⁶³ The language explicitly suggests that the interviewee is not mainstreaming human rights into their dialogues (i.e. "if we integrate" human rights), while discourse 3 is invoked to justify this choice. This is displayed by their suggestion that a) such activities are being eschewed on the basis that they will upset China ("it might antagonise [the Chinese side]") and b) that they are instead focusing exclusively on trade issues. Unlike discussion of the Article 21/NPE values, this "purely business" approach is cast as the most likely to engender productive exchanges with China (i.e. attaining "more traction").

An official from DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (GROW), also appeared to invoke the discourse in justifying their avoidance of mainstreaming controversial values with China, particularly rule of law. They described how: "obviously

¹⁶³ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

taking these things head on with the Chinese side is... they consider [it] very disrespectful, they don't respond well” and elaborated that:

It's easier to talk economy in the end, because we can boil it down to more palatable things ...Another reflection is you know, you can try to talk a lot to somebody about something but if they don't want to talk, you are only going to lose your time.¹⁶⁴

The interviewee's language again suggests that they are legitimising an avoidance of value mainstreaming due to an expected negative response by the Chinese side (“they consider [it] very disrespectful, they don't respond well”). The interviewee also infers that the linkage between mainstreaming and such behaviour by the Chinese side is almost self-evident (*obvious*). This alludes to the strength of the discourse on the EU side and displays the climate of fear associated with it, which the Chinese side may be actively contributing to. In this context, the interviewee's language also interestingly displays that their eschewing of value mainstreaming is informed by and aligning with the desires of their interlocutors, which are described as viewing the EU side raising such issues as “very disrespectful”. This supports the notion that discourse 3 is practically informing a de-facto compliance with and endorsement of China's official party-state discourse on values, which seeks to avoid engagement with the EU on controversial values.

Like the first example, the discourse is notably informing the interviewee limiting their agenda to sector-specific economic matters. This substance is cast as “easier” than discussion on controversial EU values with China (i.e. “more palatable”). Lastly, the quote explicitly reinforces how discourse 3 is informing them avoiding systematic value mainstreaming. The interviewee suggests that they perceive such activities to be not only counterproductive, but futile, due to the Chinese side's expected obstructive reaction to any attempts to do so by the EU side (“if they don't want to talk, you are only going to lose your time”).

Another key example can be seen in the account of an official from DG Justice and Consumers (JUST) connected to the EU-China Legal Affairs Dialogue (LAD). As noted in previous chapters, the dialogue represents a key focus for this thesis. This is due to the EU considering rule of law an enabler of human rights and the LAD institutionally reflecting

¹⁶⁴ Interview with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

this connection, through its design as an additional channel to promote human rights with China (See Chapter 3.6). The interviewee described how:

We've designed it, so, as I say the title, not rule of law, but legal affairs dialogue, so it's been designed to not, set these alarm bells ringing and, ... you can still raise value issues. But in the speech of our Director General, [who] will be opening it, we do not talk about human rights and ...the legal situation, arbitrary arrest, we talk about legal affairs because that would be the guarantee to get everyone walking out in 5 minutes.¹⁶⁵

The official suggests that the design and function of the LAD has been informed by the concerns associated with discourse 3. They describe how the title of the dialogue has been designed not to provoke an immediate negative reaction from the Chinese which would compromise exchanges. This is captured by the image of an alarm being triggered ("alarm bells ringing). The interviewee also suggests that while "you can still raise value issues" in this format, they are not doing so, invoking discourse 3 to justify this. They infer that they are carefully avoiding any discussion of human rights during dialogues out of a fear that the Chinese side will leave the table ("everyone walking out in 5 minutes"). The power of discourse 3 is portrayed by their suggestion of the certainty of this outcome from human rights and rule of law mainstreaming (i.e. it is "guaranteed" to trigger a negative reaction from China).

While the discourse appears to be informing controversial EU values not being explicitly included in the example above, it does not preclude these values - particularly human rights - being indirectly designed into the dialogue as envisioned by its creators. However, the interviewee's account suggested otherwise, noting that:

We have to have fruitful discussions, and... I mean the thing [dialogue] is only as good as... as much as both sides have an active interest in it, yeah? which is probably not the case with the human rights dialogue. So we have to find stuff which is... mutually interesting, so better regulation, you know, we've got something to bring [to] the Chinese, something they want... [similarly, regarding the theme of] the civil code.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

The language suggests that discourse 3 is being used to justify a gravitation towards picking more technical themes in the LAD. Like the other examples analysed, the interviewee infers that concern over upsetting the Chinese side is leading to them focus on areas which align with China's interests ("we have to have fruitful discussions stuff which is... mutually interesting"). As China has no interest in discussing the more normative angles of judicial cooperation, it makes it less likely that themes more explicitly connecting to controversial EU values will be picked. This is displayed in the themes they suggest - "better regulation" and "the civil code". Akin to the previous (DG GROW) example, the interviewee also appears to infer an acceptance of the Chinese side's unwillingness to discuss value-related issues, reflecting a de-facto compliance with and legitimisation of the official party-state discourse on values.

The interviewee's inferred side-lining of EU values in the LAD is reinforced by them pitching the human rights dialogue as an example of how discussion of values is not likely to be productive with China. This also suggests that they associate value mainstreaming in EU-China relations with human rights promotion and the human rights dialogue. This reinforces the notion that the challenges of the human rights dialogue reflect a *cautionary tale* for the consequences of mainstreaming controversial values with China, deterring such activities by officials in other dialogues.

The interviewee displayed an awareness that potential themes for future dialogues, including gender equality (women's rights) were connected to EU values, when prompted. But it appeared that these dimensions were not actively discussed on the EU side between the Commission and the EEAS officials operationalising the dialogue, nor systematically integrated into the dialogue. The EU did not appear to be lobbying for themes on a value basis. Instead the interviewee described how such connections could become more explicit in the future – in their words "further down the line".

In the short-term this seems unlikely, given the prevalence of discourse 3, which along with the perceptions that values are implicit to the LAD (discourse 1) and value mainstreaming is inapplicable (discourse 2), appear to be justifying EU values not being systematically designed into the dialogue. This reinforces the argument in Chapter 6 that these discourses are informing the LAD not meeting its potential as an effective channel for mainstreaming human rights.

A last key example from Pillar 2 dialogues was found in the account of a DG Energy (ENER) official. The interviewee was asked about the extent to which they instrumentally integrated EU values - human rights and rule of law were given as example by the interviewer - into their dialogues. They brought up the EU's 2016 China Strategy (See Chapter 6.4.3) and stated that:

I don't think you can read it as, in everything we do with the Chinese, one way or another we are addressing this [values] no ...It would not work, it would really stop cooperation in many areas if we go there with our energy issues and we [raised values]. I am glad some people do it, I think we should have this human rights dialogue and I think at some level it, with very good personal contact, very good bonding, then maybe we could address it directly once in a while but in general, as a general strategy to address it in every dialogue we have, I think it's impossible, it would not work.¹⁶⁷

The interviewee invokes discourse 3 in suggesting that they are not systematically mainstreaming values into energy dialogues due to concerns that it would compromise the dialogue. The extent of the threat posed by such activities and thus the power of the discourse is strongly reflected in their language. They suggest that value mainstreaming would be *incompatible* with the successful attainment of their sector-specific objectives ("It would not work ...I think it's impossible") and would cut off multiple dimensions of EU-China energy cooperation ("it would really stop cooperation in many areas").

The posited incompatibility also links with discourse 2 and the suggestion that value mainstreaming is not appropriate for all dialogues, as does the notion that such activities should be limited to the human rights dialogue ("I am glad some people do it, I think we should have this human rights dialogue").

Relatedly, like the DG JUST examples, the interviewee appears to associate value mainstreaming predominantly with human rights and the human rights dialogue. This reaffirms how discourse 3 is informed by the experience of others, with the human rights dialogue again framed as a *cautionary tale* of the consequences of mainstreaming controversial values with China.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with an official from DG ENER on 15.02.2017 at 10.00pm, in Brussels.

The example also displays how discourse 3 challenges the official discourse on value mainstreaming found in documents. The interviewee suggests that systematic value mainstreaming in all dialogues reflects a prospective and unrealistic strategy, as opposed to standards which they should be following (“as a general strategy to address it in every dialogue ... I think it’s impossible, it would not work”). The example also interestingly supports the argument in Chapter 6.4.3 that the more pragmatic language of the EU’s China strategy is serving to reproduce the discourse justifying a lack of systematic mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues.

Finally, the interviewee suggests that strong interpersonal relations, lacking from their dialogue, would reflect a prerequisite for value mainstreaming. While this can be taken at face value, it also arguably alludes to the rarity of such high-quality relationships between officials on each side. As described in Chapter 8, a lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge among EU officials - which aids the formation of such close relationships - was revealed by this thesis to represent another dimension informing a lack of systematic value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues and in turn, the weakness of the EU’s normative power with China.

Pillar 3: People-to-People dialogue

Discourse 3 was also identifiable in Pillar 3 People-to-People dialogues (PPD). For example, in response to a question about whether there was an instrumental effort to side-line human rights in their dialogues, an interviewee stated that:

Indeed, that will be the reason [that human rights issues aren’t raised]. Because it’s clear that if [we] started any meeting with our cultural counterparts talking about Ai Weiwei, then we can stop the meeting. Because if every time we did a meeting we start[ed] with Ai Weiwei... of course I mean, there will be no room for cultural cooperation ...They will resent it again... as an interference and ...they are very sensitive.¹⁶⁸

The interviewee invokes discourse 3 in suggesting that they are avoiding human rights mainstreaming based on concern over upsetting their counterparts. They reaffirm the

¹⁶⁸ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 17.06.2015 at 5.00pm, in Brussels.

language of their colleagues above through casting human rights mainstreaming as likely to trigger immediate negative consequences (“we [might as well] stop the meeting”). The interviewee also suggests that any inclusion of human rights in dialogues would override the agenda and preclude any discussion of sector-specific (cultural) substance (“there will be no room for cultural cooperation”). Their language reinforces the probability and magnitude of these consequences through describing how insulted and angry their counterparts will be if human rights is raised (“they will resent it ... as an interference ...they are very sensitive”). Moreover, the language here reflects a particularly strong example of how discourse 3 may also be informing a de-facto compliance with and endorsement of the official party-state discourse expressed by their interlocutors. The interviewee suggests that they are effectively complying with their counterparts desire for human rights not to be tabled on the basis that it is an “interference” in China’s internal affairs, word-choice that directly aligns with one of China’s *Five principles of peaceful coexistence* (non-interference in each other’s internal affairs) and its articulation in China’s 2014 strategy on EU-China relations (See Chapter 5.5.2).

Like other examples analysed, the quote also displays the power of the discourse in presenting these consequences as obvious/self-evident (“it’s clear”). Moreover, the interviewee appears to cast their EEAS colleagues’ negative experiences of the human rights dialogue as justification for not mainstreaming human rights. They appear to equate human rights mainstreaming with raising individual cases with China that are likely to provoke tensions, as opposed to a more subtle and indirect strategy (“if [we] started... any meeting ...talking about Ai Weiwei”). Additional examples of discourse 3 in Pillar 2 and 3 dialogues are presented in Table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1 Additional key examples of discourse 3 in Pillar 2 and 3 dialogues

Directorate (General)/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
DG Justice and Consumers (JUST) [BRU]	1. If you address the questions of governance and transparency head on with China, something like a human rights dialogue, you don't get very far. ¹⁶⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that raising controversial EU values in dialogues is pointless, as their counterparts will simply will not engage with it.
DG Environment (ENV), staffing high-profile cooperation programme, [BEI]	2. The minute you say human rights all sorts of alarm bells [start] ringing, so don't, we don't like to call it that, although I think internationally environmental rights are considered human rights, you know, that's part of the human rights basket but we wouldn't call it that because we'd be asking for trouble. So basically, I never use the word democracy, I never use the word human rights, even though a lot of the stuff that I'm doing is very much up that street. ¹⁷⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays China's expected immediate negative reaction to mainstreaming human rights ("the minute you say human rights"). • China is portrayed as entering a state of alert ("all sorts of alarm bells [start] ringing"). • Alarm bell imagery also used by DG JUST official in-text. • Invoking discourse 3, interviewee suggests that they are not mainstreaming human rights explicitly with China, in light of these expected consequences. • However, interviewee appears aware connections between their activities and controversial EU values. • Though not systematic, may allude some mainstreaming taking place.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with an official from DG JUST on 11.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels

¹⁷⁰ Phone Interview with an official from the European Commission based in Beijing on 23.06.2015 at 4.00pm (CST), from Bath.

EU Delegation to China, Information Society Media Section [BEI]	3. “Will it affect me [being requested by senior staff to mainstream values]? Of course. The Chinese don’t want to hear it ...We have a more substantial discussion through bracketing it out [i.e. focusing on sector-specific areas of mutual interest]”. ¹⁷¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that interviewee views value mainstreaming as a negative activity, impeding their sector specific objectives. • Infers that interviewee avoids mainstreaming EU values over concerns that China will be inattentive, and dialogues will be unproductive (“The Chinese don’t want to hear it”). • Suggests that they focus on sector-specific technical substance with China as a result (“We have a more substantial discussion through bracketing it out”). • Alludes to ad-hoc coordination of human rights mainstreaming by the EEAS at the EU delegation. • Captures EU officials feel they have a personal stake in the success of the dialogue. • Value mainstream may thus to be perceived as a threat to career progression.
EU Delegation to China, Information Society Media Section [BEI]	4. “If you have something they want, or they think you will shut down something credibly ...this is when something happens. Otherwise, nothing happens, zero ...What justifies us [being] here is making change on the ground, other-wise it’s like live-action role play” ¹⁷²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implies that value mainstreaming is effectively <i>a waste of time</i> as the Chinese side will not engage with it, because it does not align with their interests and the EU has no credible leverage to enforce values (i.e. conditionality). • They suggest that if they were to pursue such activities, they would be carrying out a pretend scenario which departs from reality (“it’s like live-action role play”) • Invoking discourse 3, interviewee suggests that as a result, they are eschewing values mainstreaming in favour of sector-specific areas of mutual interest.

¹⁷¹ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

¹⁷² *ibid.*

<p>DG Education and Culture (EAC) [BRU]</p>	<p>5. “So let’s say ...that we [do not] very openly talk of this kind of thing because we also know, we are very aware that in China there is a very in particular now under Xi Jinping, there is a very, cautious approach with respect to other culture's values.” There has been a very explicit, speech from Xi Jinping recently ...about the western values that we have to fight ...and they have to preserve Chinese values, which is understandable, I mean, we all try to define and protect our values”.¹⁷³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that values are not being explicitly mainstreamed in PPD due to an expected negative response by China (“we [do not] very openly talk of this kind of thing ...we are very aware that in China ...there is a very, cautious approach with respect to other culture's values.”). • Example highlights China’s role in reproducing discourse 3 through its behaviour (“There has been a very explicit, speech from Xi Jinping recently”). • It thus displays how the discourse is not just based on paranoia on the EU side or second-hand experiences of particular dialogues/officials. • Displays unusual reflexivity about the contested nature of the EU’s values and China alternative interpretation of them (“they have to preserve Chinese values, which is understandable”).
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¹⁷³ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 10.02.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

Pillar 1: Political dialogues

While EEAS diplomats operationalising Pillar 1 dialogues could be seen to share and thus enable discourse 3, the strongest examples were found in the accounts of those individuals involved with the human rights dialogue (key examples pertaining to other political dialogues displayed in Table 7.3 below). These interviewees displayed an interesting facet of the discourse. As opposed to an expected response by China informing value mainstreaming *not taking place*, these diplomats invoked discourse 3 in perceiving China's obstructive conduct as the principal barrier to their *active promotion* of human rights.

Akin to their EEAS colleagues not involved with the human rights dialogue, these diplomats appeared to be enabling the discourse in Commission-led dialogues. However, as opposed to doing so *actively* through their routine coordination activities, these individual's negative experiences with China appeared to *passively* inform other officials eschewing value mainstreaming. As highlighted in the previous section, the human rights dialogue seems to represent a *cautionary tale* invoked by officials to legitimise discourse 3.

Notably, China's obstructive behaviour during these dialogues, which explains the weak outcomes observed by internal and external critics of the framework, supports the suggestion made in Chapter 3.6 that China has emerged as the key beneficiary of the EU-China human rights dialogue. In exchange for an opaque, closed-door dialogue, where it can (and does) refuse to engage in meaningful discussions on human rights with the EU, it has been able to end annual public condemnation at the multilateral level. Maximising this benefit for the Chinese side, as described above, its efforts to undermine the dialogue are also serving to deter discussion of controversial EU values in all other dialogues. The examples below encompass two dimensions: a) China's obstruction of EU diplomats' promotion of human rights *during* human rights dialogues and b) China's obstruction of the organisation and significance of the dialogue *in advance* of each annual instalment.

a) China's obstruction to EU human rights promotion during human rights dialogue
Regarding the former, interviewees described how the Chinese side tended to get aggressive and obstruct discussion of sensitive human rights issues during human rights dialogues. As one EEAS diplomat noted:

I always say, there are trigger words, so if you start mentioning some words then normally ...the Chinese delegation gets rather upset, about things ...And basically I think they [get] quite angry and they are quite kind of shouting you know *why are you always raising this issue* [treatment of the Falun Gong followers], or the Tibetans you know, *you are talking about 3 million people, the population of China is 1.4 billion* ...and Hong Kong was also a trigger.¹⁷⁴

The notion of “trigger words” conveys how China will immediately and furiously shut down discussion of pressing human rights concerns on the EU side (“they [get] quite angry ...shouting”). These trigger words are revealed to be associated with sensitive issues for China, which are perceived to threaten its governance and territorial integrity: the Falun Gong religious sect, Tibet and Hong Kong.

The quote also captures how these dynamics are ingrained and frequent. The interviewee describes how they “always say, there are trigger words”, alluding to extensive first-hand experience. This is also reflected in the suggestion that the Chinese side provides *standardised replies*, which portrays the regularity of such obstructive behaviour, where they refuse to meaningfully engage in discussion with the EU on these issues (e.g. “why are you *always* raising this issue [emphasis added]”). These dynamics were reinforced by another interviewee:

There are certain words that they don't want to hear, at all, which infuriates them. To speak about Tibet, to speak about the Uighur ...and they don't want to speak about it.¹⁷⁵

As in the case above, the notion is that specific terminology/topics trigger an immediate angry response (“certain words ...which infuriates them”). However, the interviewee more overtly suggests that this obstructive behaviour stems from a conscious effort on

¹⁷⁴ EEAS diplomat speaking at an internal EU event about the EU-China human rights dialogue on 12.10.2017.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

the Chinese side *not* to engage meaningfully with EU human rights concerns (“they don’t want to hear [it] ...they don’t want to speak about it”).

Interestingly, the repetitive nature of these dynamics in dialogues also connects to discourse 5, surrounding the notion that *China is not listening to the EU and it should be* (addressed in 7.3.1). China’s obstructive behaviour may be partly provoked by the EU adopting a didactic approach to promoting its interpretation of human rights.

The analysis suggested that this obstruction by China was particularly acute when the EU raised individual cases (i.e. those pertaining to specific people) (*See also*: EU Council, 2015:197). This aligns with existing literature and EU and Chinese documents. As noted in Chapter 3.6, China publicly opposes this practice and considers it contrary to the “principles of mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs” (MoFA, 2014).

Reflecting this, one diplomat stated that “the Chinese react very badly when we raise individual cases”.¹⁷⁶ They described how in the last dialogue they attended, the Chinese side threatened to “cancel the rest of dialogue” prematurely and preceded to give “30-minute lectures” on each case.¹⁷⁷ This highlights an additional form of obstruction conducted by China, beyond angry dismissal of topics: tactically absorbing the limited time period of the dialogue to sabotage the agenda.

This was supported by another EEAS diplomat. They described how China “flood[s] the meetings with every detail about the daily routine” of individuals in question, giving the example of *Mr X got up at 8.00am and then went to the bathroom at 08.02am etc.* The language here portrays China’s obstruction as overwhelming the EU’s capacity to promote human rights, saturating the dialogue with irrelevant content.

Interviewees’ accounts notably highlighted that this instrumental *time-wasting* strategy extended beyond discussion of individual cases to the dialogues as a whole. As opposed to obstructing discussion of individual cases on principle, China appeared to be engaging in a comprehensive strategy to stymie the human rights dialogue. As one EEAS diplomat summarised:

¹⁷⁶ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.05.2017 at 12.00pm, in Beijing.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*

The quality of exchanges went down significantly [in recent years], so this is why the [EEAS] colleagues have the impression of talking to a brick wall; because you say something, they reply something else, they read out of the paper and they make sure the paper is 40 pages long and it's going to take half the day and that they're just going to read it very slowly ...it's one of the diplomatic techniques of how to obstruct a meeting.¹⁷⁸

The diplomat's language suggests that genuine two-way communication is not taking place, impeding practical human rights promotion. This is reflected in the suggestion that EU comments/questions are being repeatedly deflected by the Chinese side ("you say something, they reply something else") and the description of engaging China in these dialogues being like "talking to a brick wall". This simile strongly conveys how the EU side feels that nothing they say in the dialogue is being engaged with or internalised.

Displaying China's argued time-wasting strategy, the interviewee suggests that interlocutors instrumentally read out copious material for as long as possible to undermine the dialogue ("they read out of the paper and they make sure the paper is 40 pages long and it's going to take half the day and ...[they] read it very slowly"). This language reflects discourse 3, in suggesting that China's actions are the principal reason for the ill-functioning of the dialogue (i.e. "the quality of exchanges"). This is reaffirmed by their description of the Chinese side adopting a well-known diplomatic technique. Additionally, China's obstructive behaviour is cast as intensifying over time, with the "quality" of dialogues having gone "down significantly [in recent years]").

Beyond these strategies of *shutting down discussion of specific issues* or *time-wasting*, interviewees also described how China obstructed dialogues through using its (legitimate) capacity to raise concerns about human rights within the EU.¹⁷⁹ Chinese interlocutors were characterised as raising issues/cases specifically with the intent of highlighting the EU's hypocrisies, embarrassing it and countering the EU's criticisms of China, through holding the EU account to its own (internal/external) legal standards. For example, the EEAS diplomat quoted above described how:

¹⁷⁸ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

It's very clever the way they do it, because their holding us accountable to our own laws and to what we've signed up, which is exactly we're doing to them ... but they say, well look at your own member states and look at the freedom of media in Hungary.¹⁸⁰

All interviewees connected to human rights promotion suggested that China's obstructive behaviour had intensified in recent years.¹⁸¹ Reflecting on the 2017 dialogue, one EEAS diplomat noted that China was "much more aggressive" than in the past, with their counterparts described as "confrontational" and having "no willingness for the cooperation side" in the exchange.¹⁸² They added that despite efforts on the EU side to be as respectful and calm as possible, the Chinese side nonetheless made accusations to the contrary. For the interviewee, this suggested that their counterparts were following a script designed to strategically undermine the exchange.¹⁸³

b) Obstruction of the format and organisation of EU-China human rights dialogues

Interviewees also described China's efforts to disrupt the *format* and *organisation* of the human rights dialogue. Regarding the format, interviewees described how in the past, China had unilaterally refused to continue conducting the dialogues biannually and catalysed a scrapping of the accompanying civil society seminars.¹⁸⁴ In more recent years, officials highlighted how China has sought to lower the seniority of the officials chairing the dialogue (i.e. the *level*) and thus its significance.¹⁸⁵ It emerged that the EU's refusal to capitulate to China on this area resulted in the dialogue not taking place at all in 2016.¹⁸⁶ As one EEAS diplomat elaborated:

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Interviews with diplomats from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am; 07.10.2017 at 10.00am 10.10.2017 at 10.00am; and 31.01.2017 at 11.00am [phone interview] in/from Brussels.

¹⁸² Interview with a diplomat from EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁸⁵ Interviews with diplomats from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels and 31.05.2017 at 12.00pm, in Beijing.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

They suggested to send a Deputy Director General, which is at a lower level, which is what actually they had suggested in 2014 and we had lots of exchanges and we said, we do not agree with holding [it] at lower level, because we are more interested in being able to talk at a level where we can have the illusion of being able to influence the policymaking. [The] illusion.¹⁸⁷

The interviewee's language captures how the Chinese side had intensified its requests that the dialogue's level be lowered since 2014. This is reflected in the suggestion that across multiple coordination meetings prior to the planned 2016 dialogue, the issue was persistently raised by the Chinese side, despite the EU's opposition to the premise ("we had lots of exchanges and we said, we do not agree with holding [it] at lower level").

Additionally, the diplomat's word choice of "illusion" casts the Chinese side as disingenuously giving the EU the impression that they are open to meaningful discussion of human rights through holding the dialogue at a more senior level. Through trying to lower the level, the interviewee suggests that China does not even want the EU to have the "illusion" that it can seriously discuss human rights. This reflects an attribution of blame for the unproductivity of the dialogues, squarely on the Chinese side, displaying discourse 3.

The word choice also alludes to a strong degree of pessimism which is connected to discourse 5 (*China not listening the EU when it should be doing so*). In this sense, EU officials expect poor outcomes from the dialogue due to China's obstructive conduct, but they want to pretend (have the "illusion") that they can make headway, if they are engaging with a more senior Chinese official.

Capturing these intensifying Chinese efforts to undermine the format of the dialogue, another EEAS diplomat described how the following year (2017), the EU "had to accept the lower level, or no dialogue at all".¹⁸⁸ In this sense, despite the "principle-based objection" in 2016, China's renewed opposition to holding the dialogue at the established level, was such that the EU was pressured into capitulating, a controversial decision which saw NGOs refuse to be involved with the dialogue in any capacity (*See: HRW, 2017iii*).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ EEAS diplomat speaking at an internal EU event about the EU-China human rights dialogue on 12.10.2017.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with a diplomat from EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

Beyond these stark efforts to alter the format of the dialogue, interviewees highlighted long-running attempts by the Chinese side to stymie the *organisation* of dialogues. As one EEAS diplomat noted:

But even organizing a dialogue once a year is quite a challenge, and last year [2014] actually the dialogue took place at the beginning of December and we had almost given up ...and they came back a month before Christmas, more or less, and they said 'it would be nice to organize it, how about', so it was not exactly Christmas eve, but it was like 23rd of December, we said 'come on', [so] they said 'how about the 31st?'¹⁹⁰

Here, difficulties in agreeing on the dates for human rights dialogues - portrayed as a basic aspect of bilateral cooperation - is highlighted as symbolic of just how obstructive the EU finds China's actions ("even organizing a dialogue once a year is quite a challenge"). The language suggests that the EU had persistently approached the Chinese side and been rejected to the stage that they had ostensibly ceased efforts and assumed that the dialogue would not take place ("we had almost given up").

Supporting this characterisation of the Chinese side as critically impeding the dialogue's organisation, the interviewee also describes how the Chinese side approached the EU at the last minute ("they came back a month before Christmas") and initially suggested public holiday dates that the EU side could not accept in practice. Consequently, the above quote strongly displays discourse 3, with the Chinese side cast as the principal impediment to the EU's promotion of human rights through this dialogue.

Citing examples from more recent years, these dynamics appear to have continued or even increased. This mirrors an apparent intensification of China's obstruction *during* dialogues. In this vein, an EEAS diplomat noted that in 2017:

That sort of stuff hasn't changed, we've probably become better at dealing with it by experience ...that they might offer to have the next human rights dialogue on Easter, on the good Friday ...that doesn't surprise us.¹⁹¹

The language captures how China's disruptive actions have been long-running to the extent that it has become almost institutionalised for the EU side (i.e. they are "better at

¹⁹⁰ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁹¹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

dealing with it by experience”), while the proposition of unworkable dates “doesn’t surprise” them. This reinforces the notion that EU diplomats ostensibly expect poor outcomes from the dialogue due to China’s behaviour.

Emphasising the continuation of these challenging dynamics, diplomats described how the 2017 dialogue date was settled with less than a weeks’ notice, while China,¹⁹² for the first time, threatened that “we won’t hold the HR dialogue [at all]”, unless the EU refrained from mentioning China in its annual human rights statement at the multilateral level.¹⁹³ More dramatically, another diplomat felt that the Chinese side were seeking to “eradicate the dialogue ... by making it so difficult to [conduct and] discuss” human rights.¹⁹⁴ They added that China had been successful in doing so with the US, Sweden and France, leaving few bilateral human rights dialogues in existence.¹⁹⁵ EEAS diplomats also described China’s significant obstruction towards any EU attempts to deliver diplomatic demarches to the Chinese mission to the EU in Brussels, stymieing this formal channel for the EU to official express human rights concerns (See Table 7.2, Quote 4).¹⁹⁶

China’s increasing intransigence in the *organisation* and *during* human rights dialogues can be explained by certain key developments. These include China’s increasing international power vis-a-vis the EU; its increased economic significance for the EU and individual member states; along with the “authoritarian and nationalist”¹⁹⁷ policies of Xi Jinping. Additional examples of discourse 3 relating to the organisation and delivery of the human rights dialogue can be seen in Table 7.2 below. An extended table can be found in Appendix iv.

c) Obstruction of Human rights public statements

It emerged that the EU can compensate for China’s obstruction of the human rights dialogue through the publication of strongly-worded public statements. The statements express the EU’s human rights concerns - including specification of individual cases - on

¹⁹² Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁹³ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.05.2017 at 12.00pm, in Beijing.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

¹⁹⁷ Phone interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.01.2017 at 11.00am, from Brussels.

the EU's and member states' websites.¹⁹⁸ They are strongly opposed by China which sought to restrict discussion of human rights through establishing the dialogue in 1998 (See Chapter 3.6). Reflecting this, China attempts to obstruct even this compensatory mechanism for the difficulties facing the human rights dialogue. The statements require unanimous approval by the EU 27 and it emerged that China actively lobbies individual member states to break unity. As one EEAS diplomat stated:

Countries like Hungary who are very much under the spell of China's economic diplomacy and the 16+1s ...who prefer not to raise themselves bilaterally, human rights issues with China ...[they] would actually prefer, not like even the EU to raise any of it.¹⁹⁹

China's role in these countries challenging EU unity on human rights promotion is reinforced by the characterisation of them being under a "spell", as if China is controlling them by proxy, through "economic diplomacy". Supporting this, Greece notably blocked the EU's annual statement condemning China's human rights environment at UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), for the first time in history (Reuters, 2017). This was widely seen to be linked to recent Chinese investment and background lobbying (*ibid.*).²⁰⁰ This outcome, which neither side expected, led to China being effectively forced to the table in 2016, due to its threat - mentioned above - to cancel the human rights dialogue if the UNHRC statement included China.

Overall, the analysis in this section has displayed how, in line with discourse 3, diplomats operationalising the human rights dialogue consider China's obstructive actions as the principal impediment to the efficacy of the dialogue, as opposed to any strategic deficiency on the EU side. Summarising this, an EEAS diplomat stated that there was "an absence of positive will on the Chinese side ...not an absence of mutual understanding".²⁰¹ Moreover, as highlighted throughout this chapter, these negative experiences appear to be being shared by officials beyond the human rights dialogue.

¹⁹⁸ Interviews with diplomats from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am and 31.01.2017 at 11.00am [phone interview], in/from Brussels.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

²⁰⁰ Interview with a diplomat from EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

According to this interviewee, the lobbying behaviour was reflected in specific member states approaching the EU and requesting that China be removed from the UNHRC statement. These dynamics were also described by other EEAS diplomats interviewed for this thesis.

²⁰¹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.05.2017 at 12.00pm, in Beijing.

They are invoked as a *cautionary tale* of the consequences of value mainstreaming, legitimising discourse 3 and an avoidance of value mainstreaming in their dialogues.

d) Caveats to China's obstruction of EU-China human rights dialogues

It is important to qualify the analysis above, insofar as China's highly obstructive behaviour, which appears to be severely undermining the human rights dialogue, is linked to China's opposition to the nature/principle of the dialogue itself. As described in Chapter 3.6, while China pushed for the human rights dialogue in exchange for an end to public annual resolutions at the multilateral level, the dialogue is still effectively predicated on the notion that China should be adhering to and regularly held accountable by the EU (and more broadly Western) interpretation of human rights.

In this fashion, China's growing power since the emergence of the dialogue framework in the mid-late 90s, its increasingly authoritarian and nationalistic policies, along with its greater economic parity with the EU, have contributed to it becoming less willing to entertain *any* compromise with the EU on human rights. As described in Chapter 5.5.2, China's official party-state discourse on values considers such exchanges an infringement of its sovereignty. This extends to China's obstructive behaviour towards EU value mainstreaming efforts more broadly in *all* EU-China dialogues. For China, the EU does not have a justifiable basis for challenging China's human rights situation according to EU/Western standards and it obstructs such discussion accordingly.

That being said, it is crucial to reaffirm that while China is less willing to meaningfully engage in the human rights dialogue, it does not mean that the framework is not strongly in its interest. As described above and in Chapter 3.6, China has not only successfully compartmentalised discussion of human rights in EU-China relations into an opaque, closed-door dialogue in exchange for an end to multilateral resolutions, publicly criticising its policies, but it has been able to ensure these dialogues are ill-functioning and unproductive. Moreover, as an added *bonus* for China, this obstruction of the dialogue appears to be deterring the mainstreaming of controversial EU values in all other dialogues.

Table 7.2 Additional key examples of discourse 3 relating to the human rights dialogue

EEAS Directorate/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	1. There was ...moments where it quite clearly got very tense, there were questions that we asked which were not answered basically, but on certain issues it is actually possible to engage. So I think that's positive ²⁰²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights tensions during human rights dialogues ("there was ...moments where it quite clearly got very tense") • Suggests China refuses to engage with issues it does not want to discuss ("there were questions that we asked which were not answered basically"). • Infers that the EU often gets this response and that meaningful discussion is exceptional ("on certain issues it is actually possible to engage"). • Interviewee casting these rare instances as "positive" highlights the extent of China's obstruction and unproductivity of dialogue.
GLOBAL Directorate [BRU]	2. "We know that [they] put forward the history and they did during the [2016] dialogue ...the envoy [Chinese chair] said: ... <i>you have destroyed China, in the 19th century</i> - they have a very long memory - ... <i>and how can you tell us now that we are doing wrong on human rights, this is your fault? Give us the time to develop again.</i> " ²⁰³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays how China obstructively deflects criticism of its human rights record through lecturing the EU on historical grievances. • China argues here that it lacks capacity to reform human rights based on European colonialism in 19th century. • Interviewee suggests this strategy by China is typical ("We know that [they] put forward the history")

²⁰² Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.04.2015 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

²⁰³ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	3. "it's very difficult to get dates and agree on the agenda, well in advance of the dialogue because we keep saying this a way for us to ensure good preparation, the presence of experts but normally you are told like maybe six weeks before <i>those are the dates</i> and then we agree on the agenda." ²⁰⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays how China obstructs the organisation human rights dialogue through providing dates at the last minute. • Suggests that China does this reduce the preparedness of the EU side and thus stymie the dialogue. • Interviewee suggests that China conducts this behaviour despite the EU repeatedly highlighting the importance of dates organised well in advance ("we keep saying this a way for us to ensure good preparation")
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	4. "We can do a diplomatic demarche directly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which they're receiving less and less and we have hard times getting appointments to deliver the demarche, the fax machines are broken, the emails are not working, the phone lines are busy ...For a massive international player with centuries of history and maturity of international relations it is actually very immature behaviour not to want to want to face the issues that are difficult for them or where we don't agree on. It's very immature." ²⁰⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Captures how China obstructs any EU efforts to officially register human rights concerns through a diplomatic demarche. • Interviewee's language casts such behaviour as not only impeding EU human rights promotion, but intrinsically sub-par, being cast as childish in nature ("with centuries of history and maturity of international relations it is actually very immature behaviour") • Suggests this obstructive behaviour is intensifying ("they're receiving [demarches] less and less").

²⁰⁴ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

<p>ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]</p>	<p>5. When there is a crisis situation created and this one is created by the Chinese, we have a crisis when it comes to engaging on the human rights issues... then in fact it opens lots of other doors for the EU to be active on human rights through statements, through debates, through... letters, through other exchanges ...That's for the me the silver lining²⁰⁶</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays how the EU has compensated for the low productivity of the dialogue through public statements. • Language emphasises the high impact and severity of China's actions on the human rights dialogue. The dialogue portrayed as being in "crisis" and the public statements a "silver lining" • Explicitly invokes discourse 3 in suggesting that China's obstructive conduct is the reason for inefficacy of the human rights dialogue ("there is a crisis situation ...created by the Chinese").
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²⁰⁶ *ibid.*

Table 7.3. Additional key examples of discourse 3 in Pillar 1: Political dialogues (excluding the human rights dialogue)

EEAS/Council of the European Union Directorate (General)/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	1. “The minute you label it human rights ...they’re irked by it”. ²⁰⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that explicitly raising human rights with China will trigger an immediate negative response.
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	<p>2. The interviewee described how if human rights is raised out with the human rights dialogue the Chinese have said – “we have the human rights dialogue for that”.</p> <p>They also suggested that the EU had to carefully calibrate the substance of its dialogues to maximise their impact. In this context, they expressed concern about human rights negatively affecting other dialogues. The interviewee described how “[you have to] use your instrument carefully depending on the context”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays an example of how China refuses to discuss human rights beyond the human rights dialogue and in turn, how the EU’s apparent compliance with this could be perceived to represent a de-facto endorsement of the official party-state discourse on values. • Infers that human rights may be counterproductive or even futile outside the human rights dialogue. • Suggests that the diplomat may be reproducing discourse 3 amongst the Commission officials whose dialogues they coordinate.

²⁰⁷ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	3. The interviewee described how if the EU raised “individual civil and political rights ...they take notes and that’s it ... they don’t enter in political discussions”. ²⁰⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights how the Chinese side will not engage with the EU on human rights (“they don’t enter in political discussions”) impeding mainstreaming. • Suggests that the interviewee does not consider human rights mainstreaming a productive activity in the dialogues they coordinate operationalise. • Supports the notion that the EEAS is enabling or actively reproducing discourse 3.
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	4. “In some cases, some people don’t want to deal with human rights because it’s a bit of a ‘party pooper’ (laughs) ...some colleagues are a bit more reluctant to bring up human rights issues because it quite clearly does spoil the atmosphere.” ²⁰⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays the prevalence of discourse 3 on the EU side in suggesting that officials are “reluctant” to raise human rights based on the expected negative response by the Chinese side. • Alludes again to how the EU side could be perceived to be de-facto complying with China’s official party-state discourse on values. • Suggests there is an expectation that dialogues will be critically undermined (i.e. a “party pooper” which “clearly does spoil the atmosphere”).

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

<p>ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]</p>	<p>5. “Raising awareness is already a big thing... having it as an itemised item on the agenda probably going too far, also because if we push too hard there, it may antagonise the Chinese interlocutor”.²¹⁰</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays concern amongst EU officials that mainstreaming values is going to “antagonise” the Chinese side. • Suggests that the EEAS official feels like merely “raising awareness” amongst Commission officials is enough and including values on the agenda could be risky (“probably going too far”). • Supports the argument that the EEAS is enabling or actively reproducing discourse 3. • Also alludes to an enabling of discourse 1 with suggestion that EU officials knowing about value dimensions, even if they do not operationalise them, is sufficient.
<p>DG Foreign Affairs [BRU]</p>	<p>6. “The problem with human rights [is] that also you have to see how the other side will react... and it’s true that if you raise human rights, the approach with China these days is not to engage in any meaningful discussion with you ... we’ve found in the last couple of years ...if you raise human rights from the outset, you basically don’t have any dialogue”.²¹¹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that human rights mainstreaming will compromise dialogues due to the response of China (“if you raise human rights ...you basically don’t have any dialogue”). • Suggests that the Council of the European Union may also be enabling discourse 3 amongst EU officials, framing human rights mainstreaming as <i>problematic</i>.

²¹⁰ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

²¹¹ Interview with an official from DG Foreign Affairs (Council of the European Union) on 03.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

7.3 Discourse 4: China's opaque institutional structures and practices impede the mainstreaming of EU values

While not as prevalent as discourse 3, interviewees also invoked discourse 4 as a justification for not systematically mainstreaming EU values. The discourse captured a perception amongst officials that their counterparts would be likely unable to impact Chinese policy connected to controversial EU values. This was informed by interlocutors perceived hierarchal positions and portfolios, along with the opacity of China's decision-making systems. While discourse 4 was present in the accounts of both Brussels-based and Beijing-based officials, it appeared to be less prevalent in the latter, due to greater grasp of Chinese working practices. Nonetheless the EU's general lack of understanding of China, described in Chapter 8, may be fuelling discourse 4 on the EU side.

Like discourse 3, the assumptions informing discourse 4 appeared to often not be based on the personal experience of EU officials, but the shared experiences of those individuals which have mainstreamed EU values with China and experienced negative consequences. The discourse also seemed to be informed by officials' experience of Chinese officials refusing to discuss (not value-related) areas deemed not be under their responsibility. Consequently, officials appeared to have not necessarily attempted to mainstream values with their Chinese counterparts, but nevertheless avoided doing so under the expectation that they would reject responsibility. Notably, akin to discourse 3, the eschewing of value mainstreaming by EU officials informed by discourse 4, could also be perceived as a compliance with and de-facto endorsement of the official Chinese party-state discourse on values. It also reaffirms the notion that values are flowing two-ways in EU-China dialogues, with the EU effectively *engaging with* and *acquiescing to* China's values. As noted in Chapter 5.5, the party-state structure is actively reproducing the official discourse on values through its hierarchy, tightly controlling the agenda of dialogues and instructing officials to refuse to engage with controversial values (beyond the human rights dialogue framework). Additionally, as noted in Section 7.2, the EU's perceived compliance with this official party-state discourse has deeper implications, beyond a de-facto endorsement of China's official position on values, representing a self-inflicted erosion of the EU's values and their continued relevance.

However, discourse 4 is also grounded in the working reality of China's institutional structures. As one interviewee described, most Chinese institutions engaging in EU-China

dialogues do not deal with China's policy connected to controversial EU values, as part of their portfolios. Instead these areas are solely dealt with by the Ministry of State Security and the State Council.²¹² Reflecting this, the interviewee described how "it is difficult to have a conversation on these issues ...raising these [sensitive value-related] issues with people who do not have the capacity to discuss them". If these issues were directly raised in dialogues, the interviewee stated that it was common for the Chinese side to deny responsibility for them and the capacity to engage.²¹³

Officials also described how the Chinese side would often refuse to engage with any issue not specified in the dialogues' pre-agreed agenda, which was approved by their (opaque) hierarchy. Although rarely mentioned in the context of value promotion, officials often displayed frustration that their counterparts lacked flexibility in dialogues to discuss or make decisions on issues.²¹⁴ As one DG TRADE official noted, they are "very controlling" and "if anything is raised that is not on their agenda, they won't engage with it".²¹⁵ Similarly, an official from DG GROW stated:

It's true that... if you put up a proposal to the table out of the blue, they are unlikely to give you a straight answer on that because they need to consult [their hierarchy].²¹⁶

Key examples

Regardless of whether the Chinese side is accentuating the incapacity of interlocutors to engage with controversial EU values, these institutional dynamics appear to be invoked by EU officials as justification for not mainstreaming EU values. Some of the strongest examples were identified in the accounts of officials connected EU-China trade dialogues. For example, one DG TRADE official described how "we deal with the Ministry of Commerce" and that "the focus would be a bit different if we were dealing with the State Council".²¹⁷ The language implies that the values are not being integrated into the agenda

²¹² Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.05.2017 at 12.00pm, in Beijing.

²¹³ *ibid.*

²¹⁴ Interviews with Commission officials on 15.02.2017 at 10.00pm; 15.02.2017 at 4.00pm; and 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm in Brussels.

²¹⁵ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 15.02.2017 at 4.00pm, in Brussels.

²¹⁶ Interview with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

²¹⁷ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 10.03.2017 at 3.00pm, in Brussels

because their counterpart is the “Ministry of Commerce”, but they would include these issues if they were engaging with the State Council (i.e. “the focus would be a bit different”).

An EEAS diplomat connected to trade dialogues also displayed discourse 4. They suggested that directly raising values with the Ministry of Commerce would needlessly risk upsetting the Chinese side as “you would have the wrong interlocutor on the other end of the table”.²¹⁸ The language here categorically suggests that the applicability of value mainstreaming is determined by the Chinese interlocutor. It also alludes to the EEAS potentially enabling or actively reproducing the discourse through their coordination activities.

Another, Beijing-based DG TRADE official displayed how the opacity of China’s decision-making structures catalysed discourse 4. They noted that:

In principle, we should know who we should be talking to ...I’m not sure we know the decision-making process (on the Chinese side).²¹⁹

They added that “once China is transparent enough to have the conversation... the ideal conversation [on values]” they could move forward on issues like this and it would “not limit trade relations”. The interviewee suggests that they are not mainstreaming EU values because they are unsure whether their counterparts can meaningfully impact Chinese policy in their areas. They also appear to invoke discourse 3 in expressing concern that such activities would undermine trade dialogues (“limit trade relations”). In this sense, a lack of confidence about their interlocutor’s remit informs them viewing value mainstreaming as *not worth the risk*. While such knowledge may be unobtainable for EU officials, the example potentially reflects how a lack of knowledge on the EU side may be fuelling the discourse.

Interestingly, an official from DG JUST connected to the Legal Affairs Dialogue (LAD), wherein the State Council *is* the interlocutor also invoked discourse 4. They noted that “the State Council, are the State Council... I don't think they're really into promoting, value-based issues”.²²⁰ Again, the language displays the nature of the interlocutor being

²¹⁸ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

²¹⁹ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

²²⁰ Interview with an official from DG JUST on 01.03.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels

invoked as a justification for not mainstreaming EU values. However, they are invoking this discourse in the context of one of the few Chinese interlocutors which *can* credibly impact controversial EU values.

Arguably, this reaffirms how discourse 4 may be fuelled by a lack of knowledge about the decision-making structures of the Chinese side. It also alludes to how the discourse is being informed by second-hand experiences and not personal attempts to mainstream EU values.

Moreover, the above example significantly displays that discourse 4 is impacting the LAD and limiting its potential for promoting human rights. It is informing a perception that discussion of any EU values with the State Council - it can be inferred, even in an indirect manner - would be pointless. As China sought to actively eschew the normative dimensions of judicial cooperation through the LAD (See Chapter 3.6), it is possible that the State Council has instrumentally sought to present itself as unable to discuss anything but highly technical judicial issues. In this sense, the quote may allude to an acceptance on the EU side of this status-quo stipulated by the Chinese side where values are not discussed in the LAD and in turn, a compliance with the official party-state discourse.

Diplomats involved with the human rights dialogue also invoked a facet of discourse 4. They described how the interlocutor provided by the Chinese side – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) – was not directly involved in Chinese human rights policy.²²¹ As one diplomat noted:

If you discuss the NGO law for example, it is not the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who will ultimately decide what will happen with that law or how it will be implemented it's much more the security ministry.²²²

Similarly, one of their colleagues described how it is “almost impossible to set anything up” in terms of projects following dialogues.²²³ While the MoFA bring experts on human rights from other ministries into the dialogue, they stated that “it is a bit of a hurdle” for the EU to access these people afterwards, as their sole interlocutor is the MoFA.²²⁴

²²¹Phone interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.01.2017 at 11.00am, from Brussels..

²²² *ibid.*

²²³ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

²²⁴ *ibid.*

Consequently, the Chinese interlocutor for the human rights dialogue is portrayed as an additional form of obstruction.

7.4 Discourse 5: China is not listening to the EU and it should be

While discourses 3 and 4 appear to derive from genuinely obstructive behaviour/practices from the Chinese side, discourse 5 seemed to be rooted in the actions of the EU side. This nuanced discourse invoked by officials, surrounds a perception that *China is not listening to the EU and it should be*. The discourse has two key facets which challenge systematic value mainstreaming and by extension, the EU's normative power with China.

Firstly, the discourse encompasses unsuccessful attempts by EU officials to mainstream EU values in the few instances where this is taking place, particularly in the human rights dialogue. Officials invoking the discourse, repeatedly attempt to share EU values and simultaneously dismiss any alternative Chinese positions. This conduct appears to be motivated by a belief in the universal applicability and superiority of the EU's values, which countries like China are expected to replicate without significant divergence.

It also connects to assertions by scholars that the EU's normative power may be being implemented in a manner lacking reflexivity, which could be interpreted as neo-colonial by recipients or external observers (See Chapter 2.4). This, in turn, highlights a potentially negative dimension of the official discourse on value mainstreaming found in documents, if it is operationalised without sufficient reflexivity. Reflecting this, interviewees' language tends to establish an unequal, teacher-pupil relationship between the EU and China. The former is often cast as superior and more knowledgeable, having the capacity to determine the true interpretation of international law/standards and the most effective systems of political governance, to which China should be adhering. Conflicting positions from the Chinese side are concurrently dismissed as inferior or incorrect. Officials' accounts suggest a dynamic interaction where China reacts to these approaches by the EU, through seeking to assert its own alternative interpretation of these values/practices/ideas. Consequently, discourse 5 captures how both sides *talk at cross purposes*. This highlights the importance of acknowledging that the Chinese side is capable of similar *lecturing* behaviour, as reflected in Section 7.2, in the context of the human rights dialogue.

Interviewees' accounts also suggest that these dynamics lead to frustration on the EU side, with China's non-compliance informing didactic approaches to value mainstreaming. These approaches appear to be not only unsuccessful but counterproductive, seemingly catalysing China's obstructive behaviour (i.e. informing discourse 3). Moreover, even if officials recognise the ineffectiveness of these strategies, a belief that China *should be* accepting the EU's superior position leads to them to persevere, nonetheless. In this sense, the pursuit of more diplomatic and less didactic strategies is limited by the discourse. These effects appear to be compounded through a *pessimism* amongst diplomats that China will comply in the future.

However, it is crucial to emphasise that this conduct by EU officials, informed by discourse 5, is rooted in a lack of reflexivity about how, pedagogically, they are implementing the official discourse found in documents and how their counterparts will interpret it. In this regard, these mainstreaming approaches and the perspectives that inform them, which could be viewed as neo-colonial by a historically sensitive Chinese side or when assessed by an external observer, are not necessarily rooted in genuinely neo-colonial perspectives amongst EU officials. This is supported by analysis in Chapter 8, which suggests that limited understanding of China, including its culture and language, is underpinning a *default position* of Eurocentrism amongst most officials in EU-China dialogues. Importantly, the chapter also highlights that the lack of understanding is *mutual* in nature and informing comparably problematic Sinocentrism on the Chinese side.

Discourse 5 also notably has a second facet which relates to officials who are not mainstreaming EU values and invoke the discourse as a justification for not doing so. In this sense, as with discourses 3 and 4, first-hand experience did not appear to be a prerequisite for discourse 5. For these officials operationalising the majority of EU-China dialogues, the perception that *China should be embodying the EU's values and is not doing so* is arguably contributing to a perception that value mainstreaming can only be a *conflictual exercise* which will undermine exchanges.

In this sense, it deters such activities while linking with discourse 3 and the concern over upsetting China. The pessimism associated with the discourse appears to compound these effects, informing these officials pre-empting the failure of value mainstreaming. In

this fashion, discourse 5, like discourses 1-4, support Chinese as opposed to EU interests through informing values not being tabled in dialogues.

The discourse was prevalent among Brussels-based and Beijing-based officials across most EU-China dialogues. Officials connected to EU-China economic dialogues reflected an interesting exception. Reinforcing conclusions surrounding discourse 2, they appeared to display a different version of the discourse that centred exclusively on China's non-compliance with WTO norms (EU economic values), as opposed to the Article 21/NPE values.

Similarly, the discourse appeared to be much less prevalent in Pillar 3 PPD than other sectors. This is likely due to the substance of the dialogues facilitating contacts between civil society actors, rather than aiming for behavioural outcomes by China. Crucially, unlike discourses 3 and 4, which were seemingly restricted to promotion of the most controversial EU values, discourse 5 appeared to be relevant to the promotion of both sustainable development and human rights.

Pillar 2: Economic & sectoral dialogues

Particularly strong examples of the discourse were identifiable in the context of the EU-China Legal Affairs Dialogue (LAD). As an EEAS diplomat involved with it noted:

When you look at what they're doing with the judiciary, when you look at what they're doing [with] the provincial governments and what they call the rule of law, because they don't define the rule of law in the same way we do ...that's where we have to be careful, so we engage with them on better regulation agenda, we want them to keep their word, because for our businesses, there is a massive interest there, rule of law is one of the biggest obstacles, but at the same time we see that under the name of rule of law, [they are] trying to bring consistency to the application of the law or to their judiciary, there is a massive discrepancy between how they approach criminal law or civil law and, and how they sometimes let the power trickle down.²²⁵

²²⁵ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

Displaying discourse 5, the interviewee infers that China's interpretation of rule of law ("what they call the rule of law") is inferior to that of the EU's and should be altered to reflect the EU's superior, universally applicable definition. This is reinforced by their criticism of China's attempts to bring "consistency" to its judicial system, yet wrongly continuing practices which depart from the EU model. In this sense, although less explicit than the human rights dialogue, the premise of the LAD is still that China should internalise and reproduce the EU's superior system.

The language also suggests that the EU side has been trying to promote rule of law through specific dialogues with China (including the human rights dialogue), but it does not feel that this has been successful, irrespective of China's assurances. They describe how China has given its "word" to realise rule of law, yet the EU perceives honouring this to equate to a duplication of the EU's values and associated practices. Expanding upon this, the interviewee suggests that any divergence from the EU interpretation of the value is not only wrong, but dishonest/disingenuous (i.e. "we want them to keep their word"). In effect, China not reforming in line with the EU's suggestions is perceived by the interviewee (and perhaps the EU side more broadly) as a question of trust, since any agreement by the Chinese side to enhance rule of law can only be measured according to EU standards.

There also appears to be no recognition on the EU side of any Chinese historical/cultural precedent for intervention by the central power (i.e. emperor or the party-state leadership) in the interest of maintaining state cohesion (See Chapter 3.5.1). Reinforcing the teacher-pupil dynamics associated with discourse 5, China's legal system is also overtly cast as being *wrong* (i.e. China needs to "bring consistency to the application of the law or to their judiciary").

The interviewee also invokes discourse 3 in suggesting that the EU needs to be "careful" in addressing rule of law with China, avoiding explicit reference so not to undermine the exchange. This is reflected in their pursuit of technical themes (better regulation) in the dialogue and emphasis on aiding European businesses.

Building on this, a DG JUST official highlighted how pessimism that China will ever accept the EU position on rule of law was also informing an avoidance of value mainstreaming and a focus on technical themes:

The party's always going to be above the law. Yeah, fine, we're not going to change that, but if you can at least get more transparency into the legal system...²²⁶

Arguably, discourse 5, like discourses 1-4, is limiting the potential of the LAD to act as an indirect channel for human rights. The discourse informs a perception that value mainstreaming is zero-sum and can only be conflictual in nature. It is being invoked, like discourse 3, to justify a focus on technical themes and an aversion towards incorporating values, even in an indirect fashion.

Key examples of discourse 5 were also found in accounts connected to the interrelated climate/energy/environment sectors, in the context of promoting the environmental dimension of sustainable development. The examples fell into two categories. Firstly, interviewees invoked the discourse as they reflected upon the EU's historical approach in convincing China to adopt sustainable development. Secondly interviewees invoked discourse 5 in connection to the areas of the EU interpretation of sustainable development which China is perceived to have not fully internalised.

It is important to clarify that China has actively sought EU expertise in this sector. To an extent there is therefore a willing mentor-mentee relationship where China adopts EU best practice. However, China has arguably never consented to a teacher-pupil relationship where it holistically adopts the EU's values/practices/standards. This is reinforced by the existence of *ecological civilisation*, which reflects a distinct Chinese interpretation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development (See Chapter 3.4). As described in Chapter 3.4, the existence of ecological civilisation again supports the notion that values are flowing *two ways* in EU-China dialogues and alludes to the nuanced dynamics suggested in Chapter 2.4, with China appearing to reframe sustainable development, as opposed to merely accepting or rejecting the value in a binary fashion. Interestingly, the analysis below also highlights that the EU is resisting or even outright rejecting this alternative interpretation of the value.

Concerning the EU's historical approach to promoting sustainable development with China (category 1), a DG Energy (ENER) official provided a key example. They described how:

²²⁶ Interview with an official from DG JUST on 09.02.2017 at 10.30am, in Brussels.

I think they have changed ...even though in some parts it's a developing country but they now maybe... [are] themselves convinced of sustainable development ...I don't feel that we are now trying to convince them that there is a need anymore.²²⁷

The language alludes to long running dynamics where the EU has repeatedly promoted sustainable development in dialogues, which China has now internalised (“I don't feel that we are now trying to convince them”). The interviewee also arguably hints at historical frustration on the EU side that China wasn't *changing* despite the EU's efforts to *convince* them (i.e. now they have finally listened). Additionally, they appear to suggest that any continued divergence from the EU value is a question of underdevelopment (“even though in some parts it's a developing country”). There is no recognition of an alternative Chinese interpretation of the value which would inform different policies.

Interestingly, the interviewee appears to remain unsure about the extent to which China has genuinely been “convinced” by the EU interpretation of sustainable development (i.e. I think they have changed). This hints at areas where China is wrongly, from the perspective of the EU side, continuing to diverge. It also alludes to lack of understanding of China (See Chapter 8).

Other interviewees more explicitly appeared to invoke discourse 5 in describing how China was presently failing to internalise aspects of the EU interpretation of sustainable development. An official from DG Environment stated that:

I'm not sure that sustainable development is that well implanted, not just in China, but all Asia ... they [China] have to implant it into their policy, but not because they believe it.²²⁸

The interviewee suggests that China's alignment with the EU interpretation of sustainable development is somewhat superficial, being based upon China's material self-interest (“they have to implant it into their policy”) as opposed to an internalisation (they do not “believe it”). This implies that China *should be* fully approximating the EU interpretation of the value, because of its superiority and self-evident applicability. The interviewee

²²⁷ Interview with an official from DG ENER on 15.02.2017 at 10.00pm, in Brussels.

²²⁸ Interview with an official from DG ENV on 08.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

reaffirms this by the word choice of “believe”, which portrays the EU interpretation as reflecting some sort of higher power (it should be *believed in*).

Like the LAD example above, the quote also suggests that China is being disingenuous with the EU by not internalising sustainable development to the EU’s satisfaction. Again, it portrays a perception amongst officials that there is only the correct EU interpretation of the value and any divergence is China being difficult.

Supporting these inferences, the interviewee explicitly dismissed the validity of ecological civilisation, describing it as a “buzzword”²²⁹. This word choice implies that it is mere rhetoric and lacks substance vis-à-vis the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Similarly, they noted that “they try to emphasise it... that they are different”.²³⁰ The language here reinforces a dismissal of any legitimate Chinese interpretation of sustainable development. It suggests that *China is not different* and should holistically adopt the EU interpretation of the value and associated standards. Additionally, the example alludes to the Chinese side attempting in vain to convince the EU of their national/cultural context and how it informs a different version of sustainable development (“they try to emphasise it”).

Interestingly, a China official from the Ministry of Environmental Protection also appeared to allude to the dynamics/approaches informed by discourse 5 on the EU side. In the context of an environmental cooperation programme in mainland China, they described how the EU was keen to promote its model for *solid waste management* holistically. However, the Chinese side wanted to focus on specific elements which aligned with China’s circumstances and priorities, implicitly encompassed by *ecological civilisation*. They elaborated how China wanted to gain EU expertise in the areas where the European model would be relevant and adaptable to China’s particular needs. Specifically, the areas of ship recycling and soil remediation.

Reflecting this, the interviewee described how they communicated to the EU that “at first, it will be good enough for us to discuss these two main problem[s] – fix these problems first”.²³¹ Conversely, they described how “Instead the EU wanted to support the

²²⁹ *ibid.*

²³⁰ *ibid.*

²³¹ Interview with an official from the Ministry of Environmental Protection on 17.05.2017 at 3.30pm, in Beijing.

whole section”,²³² in other words, integrate all categories of EU solid waste management into the cooperation programme and thus promoting the EU model in its entirety. Moreover, the interviewee added that it took at least three meetings for the conflict to be resolved.

The example displays how the EU perceives its interpretation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development and associated practices/standards to be superior and universally applicable. The EU appears to have expected China to replicate the EU model. There is no recognition of any alternative Chinese interpretation and the circumstance underpinning this. Additionally, the example highlights how this belief on the EU side legitimises repeatedly promoting its interpretation of sustainable development and potentially in a didactic fashion (it took three meetings to resolve). The example also displays how both sides were talking at cross purposes, with the Chinese side trying and failing to communicate its position to an inattentive EU.

It is worth noting that other Chinese interviewees also appeared to allude to the dynamics informed by discourse 5 on the EU side and the possible neo-colonial interpretations of how EU officials are approaching value mainstreaming. For example, an official from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) described how EU value promotion equated to “I am God, you must put forward this” and added that instead of “preaching ideas and values”, the EU should be open to “learn from the world”.²³³ Additionally, China’s two policy papers on EU-China relations similarly appear to hint at these dynamics/interpretations associated with discourse 5. The 2003 paper emphasises the importance of addressing “disagreements in a spirit of equality and mutual respect” (MoFA, 2003). This suggests that China does not feel like it is being treated as an equal partner and the EU is didactically asserting the superiority of its values. The 2014 paper portrays comparable meaning in describing how:

The two sides have disagreements and frictions on issues of value[s] ...China believes that these issues should be properly handled through dialogue in the spirit of equality and mutual respect and encourages the EU to move in the same direction. (MoFA, 2014)

²³² *ibid.*

²³³ Interview with a scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (State Council) on 02.06.2017 10.00am, in Beijing.

A final key example consolidates the inferences throughout this section, with an official from DG Energy (ENER) noting, particularly in relation to human rights, that:

The Chinese have this real skill to give you the impression that they listen, and they discuss, and [it] doesn't actually go in. I think it's very limited [the extent to which they listen to the EU].²³⁴

The quote captures how frustration on the EU side, caused by China's non-compliance, informs didactic approaches by officials. The interviewee suggests that they perceive their Chinese counterparts to be instrumentally deceptive, as their attentiveness to the EU promoting its values is not being followed by any of the prescribed changes ("this real skill to give you the impression that they listen, and they discuss").

Moreover, the suggestion that "it doesn't actually go in", arguably infers that *it should be going in* and China *should be* internalising and replicating the EU's superior values and standards. This is reaffirmed by the interviewee implying that China's engagement with these issues, despite appearances is "very limited". The language portrays an unequal relationship, where China should be learning from the sage-like EU. Additional key examples from Pillar 2 are presented in Table 7.4 below.

Economic dialogues

It is crucial to highlight that the discourse took a different form in EU-China economic dialogues. Instead of the language suggesting that China should be embodying EU values, comparable language was focusing on how China should reform in line with the EU's superior economic standards and the frustration/pessimism following non-compliance. In this sense, EU officials appeared to be pursuing approaches that similarly lacked critical reflexivity when promoting EU economic standards and the WTO norms underpinning them. Moreover, while this reaffirms that officials working in these sectors are not systematically mainstreaming EU values, it more interestingly reinforces conclusions from the analysis of discourse 2. It emerged that officials managing EU-China economic dialogues appeared not to consider the Article 21/NPE values as their responsibility in practice, instead being exclusively bound to enforce WTO economic norms. This alludes

²³⁴ Interview with an official from DG ENER on 15.02.2017 at 10.00pm, in Brussels.

to the strength of discourse 2 in challenging systematic value mainstreaming in this sector.

For example, in the context of conflicting EU and Chinese information about the Chinese economy, including production output and carbon emissions, one Beijing-based DG TRADE official described how “one problem here” is that “you have different realities ...different stories from the Chinese side”.²³⁵ The language suggests that the economic information being communicated by China and the positions underpinning it, are fictional stories, which depart from reality (“you have different realities ...different stories from the Chinese side”).

While China’s economic information is often considered be officially altered for political reasons,²³⁶ the example displays a deeper perception of the relationship – one that is unequal, where the EU is the superior/more knowledge partner. The EU’s understanding of China’s domestic economy and its shortcomings is cast as the truth or *reality*, which China should recognise/approximate.

There is a complete dismissal of what China is communicating to the EU on the ground and no legitimacy is ascribed to the Chinese position. This was reinforced by the interviewee later describing “another interesting story” where “you have a Chinese discourse at the highest levels that China is the leader of globalisation ...a white knight”.²³⁷ The initial quote also infers frustration that *China is not listening to the EU* in the economic relationship, with conflicting understandings of China’s economy cast as “one problem” of many.

These frustrations were more explicitly displayed by another Beijing-based Commission official, as they described how bilateral conflict over the Market Economy Status (MES) issue (See Chapter 3.3) prevented agreement of a joint statement at the 2017 EU-China summit. They stated that:

²³⁵ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

²³⁶ Interview with an official from DG ENV on 08.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

²³⁷ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

The Chinese didn't agree in the end ...they, they took everything together, the joint statement failed on trade issues, the same as last year (*Interviewer*: the market economy thing?) yes ...it's the...same issue ...We can't give them what they want, we can't ...I find it unnerving personally ...that the Chinese don't come to understand that.²³⁸

The interviewee portrays repeated attempts by the EU to communicate the legitimacy of its position on MES, without success, over multiple summits. They portray the EU's position as fixed and based upon a higher logic which the Chinese side should accept if they want MES recognition from the EU, before undertaking the expected economic reforms. Again, the EU is established as the superior partner, which can legitimately judge China's alignment with international trade norms and act accordingly.

The interviewee suggests that they are frustrated by China's non-compliance, hinting at didactic behaviour on the EU side which may be counterproductive to resolving the issue ("I find it unnerving personally"). The example also suggests that China has also been trying to assert its alternative interpretation of WTO norms, but this is not seen as legitimate by the EU. This was reinforced by Premier Li Keqiang's speech at the 12th EU-China business summit. He noted that:

China has fully honoured its commitments as a member of the WTO, and other members are supposed to do the same ...it is in the interests of the EU to observe multilateral rules and uphold the multilateral system. Article 15 of China's WTO Accession Protocol is a "sunset clause," which obliges all members to unconditionally cease, upon the date of its expiry ...analogue country methodology in their anti-dumping investigations against China [i.e grant MES]. (Xinhua, 2017)

²³⁸ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

Table 7.4 Additional key examples of discourse 5 in Pillar 2: Economic and sectoral dialogues

Institution – European Commission European/ External Action Service (EEAS)	Directorate (General)/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
European Commission	EU Delegation to China, Trade and Investment Section [BEI]	1. I was here [in Beijing] ten years ago and the logic was really ...on climate change, and the European Union was the preacher of climate change on the world... it was very much about convincing China that you take this narrative and the issue and take on policies etc... and it worked. ²³⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that the EU has repeatedly promoted sustainable development with China, under the auspices of climate change (i.e. “very much ...convincing China”) • Portrays how China has been lobbied to adopt the EU’s “narrative” - its interpretation of sustainable development. • Superiority of this interpretation is reflected characterisation of the EU as a “preacher of climate change on the world”. • Ascribes religious quality to EU value which other countries should believe in. • Suggests an unequal relationship where China learns from the EU and replicates it holistically (you take this narrative and the issue and take on policies etc.).

²³⁹ ENER 2

EEAS	Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	2. “The drafting is poor ... they think the legislation not being clear is a positive quality.” ²⁴⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that China’s legislation is inferior to the EU’s standards, cast as better “quality”. • Chinese side is cast as an unequal partner which is naïve in comparison to the knowledgeable EU (“they think the legislation not being clear is a positive quality”). • Implies that China should reform its legal system to replicate the EU’s. • Interviewee displays no acknowledgement of China’s alternative historical/cultural basis for its legal system.
European Commission	EU Delegation to China, Information Society Media Section [BEI]	3. Official described how it was “absurd to assume that in a dialogue between [their DG and] the Chinese” that “you could raise human rights ...it would literally not achieve anything”. ²⁴¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that value mainstreaming is not taking place in dialogues. • Interviewee justifies this on the basis that such activities would be pointless (“literally not achieve anything”). • Displays how discourse 5 informs a pessimism amongst officials that mainstreaming will be successful, deterring them from doing so. • Strength of pessimism (and discourse 5) displayed by the interviewee suggesting that such activities would be successful was senseless or illogical (“absurd”).

²⁴⁰ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 08.06.2017 4.00pm, in Beijing.

²⁴¹ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing

Pillar 1: Political dialogues

Discourse 5, surrounding the notion that *China is not listening to the EU and it should be*, was most strongly identifiable in the accounts of EEAS diplomats involved with pillar one political dialogues. This highlights how EEAS diplomats share the discourse and through their coordination activities, actively/passively reproduce it and the approaches, lacking reflexivity, that it informs. While Table 7.5 presents broader examples, the discourse was particularly prevalent amongst individuals connected to the human rights dialogue. As one diplomat stated:

There is also a reluctance [on the EU side] because the Chinese ...they always say ‘mutual understanding bla-deh-bla-deh-bla’ and there is reluctance on our part also to engage on certain topics... because they seem to think if they keep on explaining to us certain things we’re going to accept them and they are things that we cannot accept because it’s not, it’s totally antinomic.²⁴²

The example captures how a belief in the inherent superiority of the EU position and that China should be accepting it, is informing the EU not recognising or even engaging with any alternative Chinese positions in key areas of human rights (“there is reluctance on our part also to ... engage on certain topics”). This is reaffirmed by the suggestion that China’s positions are “totally antinomic” to the EU interpretation of human rights, inferring that they are paradoxical to the EU’s correct understanding of international legislation.

It is also reflected in the interviewee suggesting that they are wholly dismissive of China attempting to legitimise its opposing perspectives during dialogues “they always say ‘mutual understanding bla-deh-bla-deh-bla’”. Through mimicking the Chinese side, the interviewee reaffirms that they do not consider their positions to have any validity. This exert also importantly alludes to how discourse 5 is informing a didactic approach by officials to promoting the EU interpretation of human rights with China on the basis that it is superior, and that China should be accepting it. Such didacticism is also reflected in the interviewee suggesting that China is repeatedly attempting to explain its alternative position, but the EU will continue to remain inattentive (“they seem to think if they keep on explaining to us certain things we’re going to accept them”).

²⁴² Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.04.2015 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

Diplomats also appeared to use references to international (UN) documents as a primary strategy to promote human rights and support discourse 5, along with the approaches it informs, displaying a lack of reflexivity *e.g. China should be listening to the EU because of international legal reference X*. The use of these documents appeared to legitimise the EU's repeated and often didactic assertions during dialogues that its interpretation of human rights was superior. As one diplomat noted:

What we can do and do do, is to remind China that they have international obligations, that they have signed up to the universal declaration of human rights and they have signed the international convention on civil and political rights and we can remind them that they need to ratify that, that there are principles in that ...and the universality of human rights is something that we do not want to break ...and that's the basis. You cannot go to China and ...try to make China adopt or act on something they have not signed up to, that's an illusion right. So that's not our agenda. What we are trying to do is make them respect the obligations that they have already signed up to.²⁴³

The example suggests that the use of international documents to support the EU interpretation of human rights fosters an almost *self-righteousness* amongst officials. The interviewee presents the EU reading of these documents as the only correct one, which is universally applicable, incontestable and that China is legally obliged to comply with. This is reinforced by the interviewee suggesting that the EU is merely enforcing external standards for the common good ("the universality of human rights is something that we do not want to break"). Aligning with prior analysis, China is again established as the junior partner vis-à-vis the EU, the latter of which already conforms to the correct human rights standards.

These power relations also appear to underpin the interviewee casting the key objective of the human rights dialogue as being to "make them [China] respect the obligations that they have already signed up to". This notion of *making China conform* to the EU's human rights standards also importantly alludes to the didactic manner in which the EU is asserting its interpretation of human rights through referencing international documents. This is reaffirmed by the interviewee's suggestion that the EU repeatedly promotes its

²⁴³ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

position with China during dialogues (“What we can do and do do, is to remind China that they have international obligations”).

The language here also implies that this didactic approach has not been successful to date and gaining compliance by the Chinese side reflects a *work in progress* (“What we are *trying* to do” [emphasis added]). Nevertheless, the interviewee suggests that they will continue using it on the basis that China *should be complying*. Promoting human rights in a less didactic fashion (not assertively citing legal references) is cast as a naïve pursuit, informed by their past negative experiences with China (“you cannot go to China and ...try to make China adopt or act on something they have not signed up to, that’s an illusion”). This displays both how discourse 5 is informed by frustrations on the EU side and how it is engendering and perpetuating ineffective mainstreaming strategies. More implicitly, the example also captures how the EU is unreceptive to China’s interpretation of human rights, being convinced that its position is supported by international law. Another EEAS diplomat’s account reinforced how discourse 5 is being supported by the referencing of international documents. They stated that:

One argument that we have [been] using more and more is actually... because they say ‘human rights, Western values, you are talking to us like a teacher would speak to a pupil and ...those days are over basically’ ... But we are saying ‘look, you have signed up to a number of conventions, you have committed to the international human rights system and standards...so basically this is what you have to respect... the obligations that you have under these international instruments’. Because then they can’t throw back at us the fact that its ‘Western values’, well they will still do it.²⁴⁴

The language again suggests that China *should be* listening and complying with the EU interpretation of human rights, an interpretation vindicated by international documents. In this sense, the EU is once more portrayed as having a superior, more knowledgeable role to China, where it can determine the accurate interpretation of international law (“we are saying ‘look ...you have committed to the international human rights system’”).

The example also again captures how discourse 5, with support from international documents is informing a didactic approach to promoting human rights on the EU side.

²⁴⁴ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

This is reflected in China being effectively *ordered* to accept the EU's interpretation of human rights ("you have committed to the international human rights system and you know standards...so basically this is what you have to respect"). It is also displayed by how the interviewee characterises China's response - it perceives the EU to be treating it as a subordinate partner and reminiscent of how a teacher lectures a pupil ("you are talking to us like a teacher would speak to a pupil").

The notion of *lecturing* also reaffirms that the EU tends to repeatedly assert its interpretation of human rights during dialogues, despite China's non-compliance, under the perception that China *should be* accepting it (reaffirming discourse 5). *Lecturing* also alludes to how the EU side's didactic approaches are engendering unidirectional communication during the dialogues. The EU appears to be actively dismissing any attempt by the China to assert its alternative position. As the interviewee notes "they can't throw back at us the fact that you know its Western values". This reinforces the lack of reflexivity on the EU side associated with discourse 5. There appears to be little awareness that such didactic approaches to promoting human rights could be interpreted as neo-colonial by their counterparts due to historical sensitivities and thus counterproductive.

Mirroring the previous examples, the interviewee suggests that this assertive approach has been ineffective, as they expect that China will continue to disagree with the EU position on human rights in the future ("well they will still do it"). However, there is no indication that the interviewee is considering a change in strategy, if anything it seems that they will intensify this oft-used didactic approach (an "argument that we have [been] using more and more"). Again, this is arguably explained by Discourse 5 legitimising the superiority of the EU's position/approaches and China's need to comply. The interviewees expectation that China will still dismiss EU human rights standards also alludes to the pessimism illuminated by discourse 5 which impedes a change in strategy.

Supporting these conclusions that discourse 5 is informing a perception that the human rights dialogue can only be approached in this didactic manner, one diplomat described how there were conscious efforts before the 2017 human rights dialogue to "avoid coming across as lecturing"²⁴⁵. Their language both confirms a historical EU penchant for

²⁴⁵ Interview with a diplomat from EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

repeatedly promoting its interpretation of human rights and an awareness of its inefficacy. However, they also described how the dialogue represented the “ultimate threat” to each side and that the confrontation in the dialogue “needed to take place” as part of a “political showdown ... [and] toxic material comes out in that format”.²⁴⁶

The interviewee suggests that discourse 5 informs EU officials being somewhat *blinkered* in viewing the human rights dialogue as an inherently conflictual exchange, with each side posing a threat to the other in a fight which *needs* to take place. Reaffirming this, such conflict is framed as being embedded in the “format” of the dialogue, while discussions are expected to be harmful for each side (“toxic”). This reaffirms how discourse 5 is having a negative impact on the EU’s normative power, underpinning ineffective approaches and eschewing more diplomatic *common ground* strategies.

This notion of EU officials exclusively perceiving the human rights dialogue to be a conflictual affair, legitimising didactic approaches, was reflected in another key example. Again, concerning the 2017 human rights dialogue, they described how in advance of the exchange, they handed their counterparts “an envelope containing 330 individual cases... which was immediately considered interference by the EU”.²⁴⁷

As noted earlier in this chapter and Chapter 3.6, China publicly expresses opposition to this practice by the EU *during* dialogues. Moreover, other interviewees suggested that the EU has a long history of conducting such activities in advance of each dialogue.²⁴⁸ Within this context, the interviewee suggests that the EU side is handing over this material under the full knowledge that it will antagonise their counterparts, however, they are doing so nonetheless. This again highlights how a perception that China *should be listening to the EU* legitimises didactic approaches, which EU officials perpetuate despite the knowledge that these approaches have not been effective to date.

Lastly, officials displayed a *pessimism* that China would ever accept the EU interpretation of human rights. This is arguably contributing to officials eschewing alternative, more diplomatic and less didactic approaches to values mainstreaming. As one diplomat noted:

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*

²⁴⁷ EEAS diplomat speaking at an internal EU event about the EU-China human rights dialogue on 12.10.2017.

²⁴⁸ Interviews with EEAS diplomats on 22.05.2017 at 12.30pm (in Beijing); 07.10.2017 at 10.00am (in Brussels); and 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm (in Bath).

If we can get them engaged in some kind of dialogue or at least if you can get them to listen to what we are saying, I think it's already improving.²⁴⁹

The interviewee suggests that they consider existing exchanges to be so unproductive that they cannot be legitimately classified as a “dialogue”. Moreover, the notion that if China was simply attentive to the EU’s positions it would reflect an improvement, highlights the incredibly low expectations held by the diplomat (“at least if you can get them to listen to what we are saying ...it’s already improving). However, this expectation also alludes to how such pessimism is not informing a re-think of the EU’s strategy. Instead, in line with discourse 5, they portray improvement as only being measured by China accepting the EU interpretation of human rights. This displays how pessimism also contributes to a *blinking* amongst officials, where they perceive that value mainstreaming can only be highly assertive or didactic due to the legitimacy of the EU position.

Another diplomat supported these conclusions in describing how in advance of the 2017 human rights dialogue, the EU side were considering the impending exchange as “fine, as long as they shout and don’t leave”. This again infers incredibly low expectations on the EU side. The interviewee suggests that the dialogue would be considered successful if both sides merely remained at the table for the full duration of the dialogue, while any progress on substance is so unlikely it’s not worth speculating on. Similarly, the expectation that the Chinese side would get upset, highlights that the EU side is sticking to didactic approaches based on the perceived inherent superiority of the EU position. Additional examples of discourse 5 connected to the human rights dialogue can be found in Table 7.6 below.

²⁴⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

Table 7.5 Broad examples from Pillar 1: Political dialogues

EEAS Department (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	EEAS Quoted example	Analysis
Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	1. “If the Chinese are emerging as global players, they need to ascribe to universal values ...these are proven as universal values”. ²⁵⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforces the portrayal of China as a junior partner vis-à-vis the EU • Portrays China as not yet a major international actor and perhaps will not become one, unless it aligns with the universal values promoted by the EU. • Universal values are cast as uncontested. The EU interpretation is framed as the only correct one and the no recognition of any alternative Chinese interpretation (“proven as universal values”) • Alludes to didactic approaches by the EU as it turns to international legal references to assert the superiority of its position in the face of Chinese non-compliance.
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	2. “They are (only) changing in line with how we’d like them to be in some areas, like climate change, but there are other areas where there are different priorities between the EU and China. There has been disconnect between the EU’s expectation of change versus outcome”. ²⁵¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portrays an unequal relationship where China should be “changing” in line with the superior EU values/practices/standards, at the EU’s discretion. • Alludes to frustration that China is not complying with the EU’s “expectations”.

²⁵⁰ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.05.2017 11.00am, in Beijing.

²⁵¹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 20.02.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

Office of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights	3. "I think that we have seen a lot of progress in the last few decades and ... and I think the West has been very helpful with that ...it's the West and the European project [the EU] that has been enormously helpful in training China's legal profession for example, teaching them about international law, teaching them about human rights..." ²⁵²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infers an equal relationship between the EU and China. • China framed as being assessed according to the extent to which it is meeting the EU's correct standards. • This is displayed by the notion EU describing "progress" and "teaching" China about EU values/practices/standards, which suggests a <i>teacher-pupil</i> relationship. • EU sharing these aspects cast as an altruistic activity, reinforcing the notion that the EU considers them inherently superior and no Chinese alternatives to be legitimate.
Office of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights	4. "I've never been one of those people who sort of expected China to immediately turn into a Western style country, but I expected that it would kind of be a long historical process... I think if you have that perspective China has moved [forward] and the West has been helpful [in moving] it along. That [doesn't] mean that we don't see sometimes backlashes, or things going in the wrong direction, which I think we have also seen in China in the past few years ...if you take the long view ...I still think it's very important that we continue to engage and that we continue to try to lure them, to adhere to a sort of rules based international system and rule of law and so on" ²⁵³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays a perception on the EU side that should replicate the EU's superior values/practices/standards • The interviewee judges progress on this basis. • Again implies unequal relationship. • Anything not aligning with the EU's expectations is cast as not only wrong but moving backwards ("the wrong direction") i.e. moving backwards. • Reaffirms that the EU's values/practices/standards are considered the only <i>correct</i> approach. • Alludes to the conflict to date on values and the ineffectiveness of existing EU strategies ("it's very important that we continue to engage"). • This also infers that individuals on the EU side think that the EU <i>should not</i> continue to engage on values. Captures frustrations from China's non-compliance which inform discourse 5 • Portrays the EU repeatedly promoting the EU interpretation on controversial values in dialogues until China finally accepts it. • Reaffirmed by image of <i>fishing</i> until a fish bites.

²⁵² Phone interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.01.2017 at 11.00am, from Brussels

²⁵³ *ibid.*

Table 7.6 Additional key examples of discourse 5 relating to the human rights dialogue

Institutional location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	EEAS Quoted example	Analysis
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	1. Right, ok, they might feel lectured or they might feel that it's not a level playing field, but that's where the universality of human rights comes into play. ²⁵⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alludes to how officials reference international documents to support the perceived superiority of the EU interpretation of human rights. • Suggests that this approach tends to be didactic nature, informed by frustrations that China is not complying. • Infers that China is not treated as an equal partner, being <i>lectured</i> by the EU (teach-pupil imagery). • Interviewee is aware that the Chinese side finds this approach disrespectful but will continue to do so in future dialogues nonetheless ("that's where the universality of human rights comes into play"). • Perception that China <i>should be listening to the EU</i> (discourse 5) justifies this didactic approach.
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	2. The interviewee described how they had discussed human rights promotion strategies for engaging with China with Japanese officials. The interviewee stated that they recommended that "you start by praising people and it's true, that for a very long time we go to straight to the criticism". ²⁵⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alludes to didactic approaches to promote human rights by the EU side which <i>criticises</i> China in dialogues. • Suggests that the EU asserts its superior position and extends no legitimacy to the Chinese interpretation of human rights ("we go to straight to the criticism"). • Displays recognition that the EU has eschewed more diplomatic approaches. This can be explained by the prevalence of discourse 5 amongst officials, which justifies this.

²⁵⁴ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

²⁵⁵ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

<p>ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]</p>	<p>3. So ...the next stage [from promoting human rights in dialogues] is to monitor the implementation and hold them accountable to their word, that's where we need to concentrate on ...they've started consulting us on legislation, now they do these public consultations. We have given them feedback on counter-terrorism, cyber security, national security... foreign NGOs, e-commerce legislation, we're giving them police community... religious affairs (yeah) all these amendments, all this legislation we are giving feedback. Are they being taken into account? Not so much. But at least we're establishing a written record of where we see discrepancies, where we see threats ...where we do not see eye to eye.²⁵⁶</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portrays an unequal relationship, where the EU polices the extent to which China is adhering to superior EU standards in its legislation ("monitor the implementation"). • Equates the adherence with EU standards to a question of trust ("hold them accountable to their word"). • Reinforces how strongly the EU side believes that its values/practices/standards reflect the only correct model. • Also suggests EU has the authority to determine if China is acting in line with its words. • Interviewee acknowledges that existing EU outlook/approaches to human rights promotion are not successful but makes no suggestion of the need for exchange. • Perpetuation is justified on the basis that <i>China should be listening</i> to the EU interpretation of human rights (discourse 5).
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²⁵⁶ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

<p>ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]</p>	<p>4. When you feel in despair that all... [that] nothing is happening with China or that this human rights issues and everything, you go talk to the EUSR [EU Special Representative for Human Rights], he will draw from the experiences of other regions in the world ...I've listened to him and he does inspire you when he talks about, you know, how it's not a zero sum game, how it's still worth pursuing and how in his travels around the world he sees the perceptions of how EU is a stronghold of human rights still, despite all the crises we're going through.²⁵⁷</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Captures how pessimism about China listening to the EU limits the pursuit of alternative strategies which are less didactic. • Word choice of “despair” strongly captures this sense of pessimism through its suggestion that there is a loss of hope on the EU side. Reaffirmed by the notion that “nothing is happening” and only listening to the EUSR encourages them that “it’s still worth pursuing”. • Allusion to a perception on the EU side that promotion of human rights can only conflictual, legitimised by discourse 5 (“he does inspire you when he talks about how it’s not a zero-sum game”). • Nevertheless, interviewee made no indication that they were seeking to adopt a different approach with China.
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²⁵⁷ *ibid.*

7.5 Conclusions

Supporting the conclusions from Chapter 6, this chapter displayed how Commission and EEAS officials were also justifying a lack value mainstreaming based on discourses casting China as the principal impediment to such activities. Like the *organisational discourses*, these discourses were informing Commission and EEAS officials not fulfilling their expected roles in systematically mainstreaming values in *all* EU-China dialogues, institutionally coordinated by the latter. These discourses, in turn, were also contributing to the weakness of the EU's normative power with China practice.

Discourse 3 captured how EU officials were avoiding mainstreaming the most controversial values into EU-China dialogues (e.g. including human rights, but not sustainable development) on the basis that such activities would likely trigger obstructive behaviour by China and compromise exchanges. This discourse appeared to be the dominant discourse invoked by officials to legitimise a lack of value mainstreaming. Relatedly, discourse 4 referred to how officials considered value mainstreaming pointless as well as perilous to the success of dialogues, due to the perceived incapacity of their Chinese interlocutors to impact China's policy in these sensitive areas. These two discourses appeared to be principally informed by genuinely obstructive actions by China.

Discourse 5, however, appeared to be rooted in the EU's actions, which undermined its normative power. The discourse related to a perception that *China is not listening to the EU and it should be* and displayed two key facets. Firstly, the discourse appeared to inform a lack of reflexivity amongst EU officials, engendering approaches to value mainstreaming and associated perspectives that could be interpreted as neo-colonial by their Chinese counterparts and external observers. In this fashion, officials were found to be repeatedly attempting to promote EU values with the Chinese side in the few dialogues where this is taking place – particularly the human rights dialogue - while dismissing any alternate Chinese interpretations. China's repeated non-compliance appeared to engender frustration on the EU side, underpinning didactic approaches which were unsuccessful or even counterproductive. These approaches appeared to be perpetuated nonetheless by a conviction that China *should* accept the correct EU interpretation of values and a pessimism that it would ever do so.

Secondly, discourse 5 appeared to justify an avoidance of value mainstreaming in all other dialogues, informing officials framing such activities as inherently conflictual and unlikely to be successful.

In this context, it emerged that for all three discourses, personal experience of mainstreaming values with China did not appear to be a prerequisite for sharing these discourses. The negative experiences of those individuals which had conducted these activities, particularly those connected to the human rights dialogue, appeared to act as a *cautionary tale* for others, legitimising an avoidance of value mainstreaming on the basis of discourses 3-5.

Additionally, like the *organisational discourses*, these discourses surrounding *China's role* appeared to practically support Chinese, as opposed to EU interests in informing EU values not being tabled in dialogues. For discourses 3-4, it seemed that China may be even actively contributing to a perception among EU officials that value mainstreaming will compromise dialogues. In this context, it was argued that as real or expected resistance from the Chinese side towards discussing controversial values appears to be informed by a facet of the official party-state discourse, an eschewing of value mainstreaming based on discourses 3 and 4 could be perceived by observers and the Chinese side as a compliance with this party line and an indirect endorsement of the official Chinese position on these values. This highlighted the importance of recognising the two-way flow of values in EU-China dialogues, displaying the EU effectively *engaging with* and *acquiescing to* China's values. Moreover, as illuminated by Shklar (1989), it emerged that, as the EU's values and their relevance is informed and empowered by a fear of the cruelty engendered by totalitarian governments, EU officials failing to assert the EU's values with China, particularly on the latter's request, represents an act of self-harm which actively erodes the EU's values and their continued pertinence. These dramatic implications seemed to be neglected by a complacent EU side, which was prioritising the smooth attainment of sector-specific objectives.

The analysis also suggested that discourses 3-5 were similarly limiting the potential of the EU-China Legal Affairs Dialogue (LAD) to act as an effective channel for promoting human rights, deterring value mainstreaming through the dialogue. Moreover, again it emerged that EEAS diplomats, through sharing these discourses, were playing a role in enabling or actively reproducing them amongst Commission officials through their coordinating role.

This appeared to also take place passively in the context of the EEAS's (negative) value promotion experiences being invoked as a justification for avoiding systematic value mainstreaming.

Chapter 8 - Challenges to value mainstreaming III: Lack of understanding

8.1 Introduction

Previous chapters uncovered discourses justifying a lack of systematic value mainstreaming by EU officials in EU-China dialogues. This chapter goes beyond these discursive practices, examining an additional factor that appeared to be weakening the EU's normative power in practice: a lack of understanding of China amongst EU officials. The analysis suggests that this deficit could also be contributing to the discourses legitimising an avoidance of value mainstreaming, most explicitly, those surrounding *China's role* (discourses 3-5). In this sense, insufficient knowledge about China amongst EU officials may be informing a lack of reflexivity about their approaches to value mainstreaming and a limited capacity to identify and pursue common ground in these controversial areas with resistant Chinese interlocutors. This suggests that in the absence of requisite knowledge and understanding, officials are engaging with China on a Eurocentric basis which is negative to bilateral relations. However, this chapter importantly highlights that there is a *mutual* lack of understanding in EU-China relations, alluding to the existence of comparably problematic Sinocentrism on the Chinese side. Consequently, as suggested in Chapter 3.6, ethnocentrism can logically be seen to reflect the *default position* for most individuals on each side unless efforts are taken to enhance mutual cultural and linguistic understanding.

Section 8.2 first reveals how interviewees' language alluded to limited understanding of China and its motivations on the EU side, a deficit seemingly supported by EU and Chinese policy documents. Section 8.3 then describes how this lack of understanding may stem from limited Chinese cultural and linguistic knowledge among EU officials. Lastly, section 8.4 provides important caveats to the potential impact of the EU improving capacity in these areas.

8.2 Language displaying a lack of understanding on the EU side

Interviewees' accounts often explicitly suggested a broad and fundamental lack of understanding of China, its institutional structures, culture and motivations on the EU side. The deficit was present in the accounts of Brussels-based and Beijing-based officials from both the European Commission and the EEAS. However, as discussed in Section 8.3, a minority of individuals, due to personal experience/initiative, displayed a greater understanding of China.

Pillar 2 Economic & sectoral dialogues and Pillar 3 People-to-People Dialogue

At the most basic level, Commission officials involved with Pillar 2 and 3 dialogues often broadly alluded to a lack understanding of China in interviews, which negatively impacted their dialogues. An official from DG Environment (ENV) provided a notable example. They described how in recent years they had conducted "a very interesting exercise", where they sought to ascertain "how many dialogues do we have" - asking both the EU and Chinese side. The interviewee revealed that China considered there to be more environmental dialogues than the EU: "they perceived some environmental projects as dialogues". For the interviewee, this reflected an "example of the cultural differences that affect every sphere of cooperation." The quotes display how a bilateral lack of understanding is such that each side does not agree on the format and consistency of bilateral cooperation i.e. what constitutes a dialogue. In this sense, the example highlights how such misunderstanding affects not only EU officials, but also their counterparts.

However, the most interesting examples, involved officials describing *building understanding* with their counterparts as a principal, yet long-term objective for their dialogue, where little progress had been made to date. For example, an official from DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL) described how the purpose of their dialogues was to "understand what's happening in China ...to learn what is going on there" as well as influence China's development of "labour standards". This language suggests that despite years of bilateral cooperation in this sector (since 2005),²⁵⁸ the EU is

²⁵⁸ Interview with an official from DG EMPL on 06.10.2017 at 4.00pm, in Brussels.

still trying to improve basic understanding of China's systems and motivations along with their alternative cultural foundations.

Arguably such basic knowledge represents a crucial platform for effectively mainstreaming the value dimensions of this sector, providing officials with the capacity and confidence to pitch EU values in a (reflexive) fashion which will resonate with the Chinese side. The language in the above example was interestingly reproduced during a dialogue connected to this sector that the author attended. The EU co-chair stated in their opening remarks that "the development of China's social system is little known [to the EU]" and they described how they were "interested in knowing the situation in China".²⁵⁹

The analysis of examples from Pillar 3 People-to-People dialogue(s) (PPD) supported these inferences. PPD can be seen to inherently support the existence and importance of a lack of understanding. As noted in Chapter 3.6, it was specifically established to resolve a mutual lack of understanding in EU-China relations and by proxy, the negative ethnocentric tendencies it appears to inform on each side. However, interviewees involved with PPD suggested that this desire to build basic understanding remained unchanged in 2017, 5 years after PPD was established:

So the main objective is in fact to help people to understand each other from the two sides and also, this, facilitation of easier understanding, mutual understanding.²⁶⁰

While the continuing need to build basic understanding arguably implies limited progress to date, another interviewee more explicitly confirmed this and its severity. They described how progress in facilitating EU and Chinese civil society contacts through official-level dialogues was being impeded – somewhat ironically – by the bilateral lack of understanding, despite the EU's best efforts:

²⁵⁹ European Commission from DG EMPL speaking at an EU-China dialogue connected to social policy and employment on 09.10.2017, in Brussels.

²⁶⁰ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 10.02.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

It's like a contradiction ...and that's one of the problems ...with China... because indeed it's mainly a dialogue between ...high level administrations and their representatives. You know, what we are trying to do, but I must say it's not easy, it's ...[to move] more in the direction of people-to-people context and to try also to reach out to the civil society, we are trying to move from a very, indeed, official dialogue to something more concrete people-to-people, but I must say it takes time and it's not [easy]... obviously the Chinese have a different perception, I mean we all know this, it's extremely centralised ...civil society doesn't have the same meaning there ...it's a long way, we are not there yet. But this is the direction.²⁶¹

Aligning with observations in the very limited existing literature on PPD (See Chapter 3.6), the interviewee highlights that in practice, PPD is not functioning as intended by the EU side. It remains a top-down exchange due to China's approach, which stymies the building of links between each side's civil societies to aid EU-China dialogues, as envisioned. They cast this reality, which contrasts with the EU's expectations as a "contradiction". While the interviewee displays a knowledge of China's top-down governance, its implications for civil society and its role in informing the diplomatic impasse, the notion that both sides are unable to agree on the dialogues' basic format and its objectives alludes to a broader mutual lack of understanding. This aligns with the DG ENV example and emphasises the depth of the bilateral lack of understanding.

Similarly, the official infers that they are unsurprised about this situation ("the Chinese have a different perception, I mean we all know this"), while such foundational disagreement is portrayed as only "one of the problems ...with China". This alludes to numerous tensions affecting EU-China cooperation (i.e. the prevailing lack of understanding), which are far from being resolved ("it's a long way, we are not there yet").

Conversely, it is important to recognise that improved knowledge on the EU side would not necessarily enhance PPD, due to China's working practices and the barrier they present coupled with the comparably limited *European* knowledge amongst Chinese officials, being largely unimpacted by any actions on the EU side (See Section 8.4). However, more informed perspectives about China's institutional systems and their

²⁶¹ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 17.06.2015 at 5.00pm, in Brussels.

cultural basis may aid greater compromise which could enhance these dialogues. Additional key examples alluding to lack of understanding of China in Pillar 2 and 3 dialogues are presented in Table 8.1 below.

Table 8.1 Additional key examples alluding to a lack of understanding of China in Pillar 2 and 3 dialogues

European Commission Directorate General (DG)/Delegation Section and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
DG Education and Culture (EAC) [BRU]	1. "I guess not everybody has a clear idea of what China is...what we can expect from China and ...what they actually want ...I mean they are not clear either but maybe it's on purpose." ²⁶²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests a lack of understanding on the EU side. • EU officials cast as lacking fundamental knowledge about China and its objectives. • Appears to be blame China and its opacity for this lack of knowledge. • Connects to discourse 4 and officials avoiding value mainstreaming due to concern that their counterparts cannot engage with/impact such issues.

²⁶² Interview with an official from DG EAC on 17.06.2015 at 5.00pm, in Brussels.

N/A: Local Staff, EU Delegation to China [BEI]	2. The interviewee described how “I think that the EU side needs to do more research... [on] the way of the Chinese government... Chinese people’s thinking”. They added that EU officials “were arrogant” and that there was “a lot of misunderstanding” in political exchanges with China. The interviewee reiterated that human rights was sensitive, but “could be handled differently.” Instead, they interviewee said that the EU “should share stories” about life in the EU, using case studies that let Chinese people know they could live like that (with regard to for instance levels of gender equality, like long maternity leave) ²⁶³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly confirms lack of understanding and its negative impact on EU-China relations (“there is a lot of misunderstanding”). • Blames this on the EU side’s lack of knowledge. • Suggestion that officials need to educate themselves about fundamental features of Chinese culture and political systems. • Alludes to connection between this lack of understanding, insufficient reflexivity on the EU side and the didactic approaches to assert EU objectives it informs (“human rights could be handled differently”). • Officials’ perceived superiority of EU interpretation of values captured by suggestion that officials are “arrogant”. • Suggests less didactic approaches for promoting human rights, which are effectively ruled-out by discourse 5 and the perception that China <i>should be accepting the EU interpretation of values</i>.
DG Education and Culture (EAC) [BRU]	3. The interviewee noted that the general objective of the cultural affairs dialogue with China (and HPPD more broadly) was to “go down [to the non-official level] and make sure that what is shared is really shared and what is learned is really learned ...so far it has been hyped ...but rigid exchanges [in practice].” ²⁶⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reiterates how PPD is not resolving a lack of understanding due – ironically – due to a lack of understanding. • Displays failure by both sides to agree on the format and objectives of PPD.
N/A: Local Staff, EU Delegation to China [BEI]	4. The interviewee said that there were “only official contacts” and that “if you randomly asked a Chinese student on your [Renmin University of China] campus, they wouldn’t know about HPPD ...it’s not people-to-people but official-to-official.” ²⁶⁵	

²⁶³ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 26.05.2017 at 10.00am, in Beijing

²⁶⁴ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 24.02.2017 at 3.00pm, in Brussels.

²⁶⁵ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 26.05.2017 at 10.00am, in Beijing.

Building understanding an objective in EU and Chinese policy documents

It is also worth highlighting that building understanding and trying to tackle an existing and significant knowledge-gap, often reflects a principal objective in EU and Chinese policy documents. In this context, the joint *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation* (2012) displays typical language found throughout EU documents on China. It describes how the (Pillar 1) High-Level Strategic Dialogue reflects a “platform to increase mutual understanding, deepen mutual trust, and build common ground” (EEAS, 2013:3). The language alludes to a dearth of understanding in the relationship, limited trust and the need to reach common ground as a key objective.

A more recent example is reflected in the EU’s guiding strategic document on EU-China relations, *Elements for New Strategy on China* (2016) (See: Chapter 6.4.3), which describes how:

The EU should network its analytical resources so as to correctly assess the motivations of Chinese policy and capitalize on opportunities to strengthen EU-China relations. (EU, 2016ii:18)

The language infers that to date, the EU has not been *correctly assessing* China’s policies and their motivations, and that every possible opportunity on the EU side should be exploited to resolve this. This reinforces the picture of a lack of basic understanding of the Chinese side, which the EU seeks to remedy as a priority objective.

Notably, the European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs’ (AFET) sole communication on EU-China relations (2015) makes the connection between a deficit in understanding and bilateral disagreement over values (specifically human rights), describing it as an:

Important source of conceptual differences leading to [a] lack of understanding and distrust in EU-China relations and limiting progress in the EU-China human rights dialogues. (EU Parliament, 2015:18)

The quote captures how a deficit in understanding derives from a disagreement over values, yet it also importantly infers that a deficit in knowledge about each side’s culture/language/institutions is impeding any resolution of this, fostering a hostile environment for attaining common ground. This supports the argued connection

between a lack of understanding and the discourses impeding EU value mainstreaming, described in Chapters 6 and 7.

References to a bilateral lack of understanding are also frequent in policy documents and press releases connected to individual sectors of EU-China cooperation. These documents often premise cooperation on *building or deepening mutual understanding*. For example, the Joint Statement on Dialogue and Cooperation on Climate Change (2010) describes establishing a regular climate change dialogue to “deepen mutual understanding” (EU Commission, 2010), while the Legal Affairs Dialogue is cast as a “platform to exchange experiences on the Rule of Law and increase mutual understanding” (EU Commission, 2016iii) in the press release following the inaugural dialogue.

Similarly, the Work Plan 2017-2018 of the EU-China Roadmap on Energy Cooperation (2018) describes the need to “create common understanding” (EU Commission, 2017iv) in almost every aspect of energy cooperation. In this case, it emerged in interviews that the dialogue had been frozen for several years due to bilateral conflict, largely over an inability to cooperate on energy security.²⁶⁶ China considered the issue geopolitical and the relationship in this area to be one of competition rather than cooperation.²⁶⁷ This has resulted in energy security being replaced in future dialogues - which *restarted* in 2017 - with the less contentious area of international energy markets.²⁶⁸ This development itself alludes to a bilateral lack of understanding.

It is important acknowledge that the language identified in the above examples reflects diplomatic jargon which is not unique to EU-China relations. However, considering its prevalence in EU documents and the analysis of interviewees’ accounts throughout this chapter, it appears to be more consequential for EU-China relations. Limited mutual understanding is impeding bilateral relations, particularly in the case of values.

Comparable language is also present throughout China’s two policy papers (2003 & 2014) on the EU to date (See: MoFA, 2003; 2014). For example, the 2014 paper describes how the China-EU Industrial Dialogue Consultation Mechanism should be “enhanced ...[to]

²⁶⁶ Interview with an official from DG ENER on 15.02.2017 at 10.00pm, in Brussels

²⁶⁷ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*

Discussion of international energy markets reflects EU-China cooperation as major international energy consumers. Dialogues will address aspects such as the predictability of supplies and transparency in pricing (*ibid.*).

increase mutual understanding, resolve differences, expand common ground” (MoFA, 2014). The lack of understanding was also displayed during Xi Jinping’s state visit to the EU in 2015, where he used his speech at the Colleges of Europe (Bruges) as an “opportunity to describe ...what a country China is” reflecting the need to improve mutual knowledge. He detailed fundamentals aspects of Chinese society, culture and history to the EU audience. For example, he stated that:

To observe and understand China properly, one needs to bear in mind both China’s past and present and draw reference from both China’s accomplishments and the Chinese way of thinking ...One can hardly understand China well without a proper understanding of China’s history, culture, the Chinese people’s way of thinking and the profound changes taking place in China today. (European Commission, 2014ⁱⁱⁱ)

The language infers that there is an incomplete and limited understanding of China amongst Europeans, including its history, culture and societal development. While this sentiment is aimed at multiple audiences, including European civil society (particularly academia), it is also directed at the official level on the EU side. Additionally, it is important to emphasise that the lack of understanding is not limited to the EU side, being *mutual* in nature, as described in most policy documents. As President Xi noted in the same speech:

To move our relationship forward, China needs to know more about Europe, and Europe needs to know more about China. (*ibid.*)

Consequently, remedying the mutual lack of understanding requires action by *both* the EU and China.

Pillar 1 Political dialogues: Identifying linkages between a lack of understanding and the discourses impeding value mainstreaming

As the EEAS coordinates EU-China dialogues, diplomats from the institution provided the strongest examples alluding to a lack of understanding of China, often explicitly recognising its existence and significance. Moreover, their language importantly appeared to suggest a linkage between this knowledge-gap and the discourses justifying a lack of systematic mainstreaming, specifically those surrounding *China’s role*. Allusions to

discourse 5 were particularly prominent. A lack of reflexivity in officials' value mainstreaming approaches and their didactic nature, seems to be symptomatic of limited understanding of China and the historical/cultural basis of its positions. As one diplomat stated:

I think ...that we are failing ...to understand China and China's strategy as well ...one thing I think is really, I mean I find it quite funny and I think it is a good illustration of people not understanding what China's about... you know some of my colleagues have written [the] *great paradox that China is sometimes liberalizing, you know liberalizing its economy, not its political [sphere]* ...but it's only a paradox if you are Western.²⁶⁹

Here, the diplomat's language portrays a challenge in understanding China and its bilateral and global approach/objectives, which is cast as an ongoing shortfall by the EU ("we are failing ...to understand China and China's strategy"). Displaying this, the interviewee's vignette captures how individuals from the EU side are unable to identify with fundamental aspects of China's governmental system and the logic underpinning this, narrowly assessing it according to a Western perspective.

The language thus hints at the argued connection between the bilateral lack of understanding, the lack of reflexivity associated with discourse 5 and the didactic approaches to promoting values it informs. It infers that EU officials express an expectation that China *should* approximate the EU's superior model of political governance and related values, without recognising any alternative Chinese model and its historical/cultural origins, in order to reflexively calibrate approaches. Interestingly, the interviewee appears to infer that they view this lack of understanding amongst their colleagues as a form of naivety ("I find it quite funny"), reinforcing that this knowledge-gap reflects a deficit on the EU side.

Another diplomat alluded to this shortfall in describing how "what is surprising is the Chinese system ...the lack of knowledge on the EU side [about this]".²⁷⁰ Their language suggests that the EU side has limited understanding of China's decision-making systems. The depth of this is captured by them expressing *surprise* at the extent of it. The example also notably displays a connection between the lack of understanding and discourse 4,

²⁶⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.04.2015 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

²⁷⁰ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 08.06.2017 4.00pm, in Beijing.

which legitimatises an avoidance of value mainstreaming on the basis that interlocutors are perceived to be unlikely to impact relevant Chinese policy. In this sense, limited understanding of China's institutional systems may be exaggerating their opacity.

An EEAS diplomat, with greater knowledge of China, highlighted the linkage between the EU's lack of understanding of China and human rights mainstreaming, aligning with the AFET report analysed in the previous section. The diplomat noted that:

Regarding China now ...I think we, there is a widespread lack of understanding ... of Chinese culture in this house ...sticking to the speech the universality of human rights etc., which is true on the paper, but I mean ...if you go to Asia, Japan as well, you will see that the notion of privacy for instance, of the individual, of individual compared with all of the collectively or the community, It's totally different. And it has some consequences, in terms of how the Chinese see human rights.²⁷¹

The interviewee alludes to the extent of the lack of understanding of China on the EU side, describing it as "widespread" and spanning across the EU's institutions ("in this house"). Additionally, like the first example, they appear to suggest a degree of naivety and ignorance on the EU side, with officials dogmatically "sticking" to the EU interpretation of human rights in an ineffective fashion which lacks reflexivity, while remaining ignorant to the cultural basis which informs the conflicting (official) Chinese interpretation ("if you go to Asia ...it's totally different"). This reinforces a connection between the EU's knowledge-gap and the didactic approaches to human rights mainstreaming captured by discourse 5.

This linkage was similarly implied by another highly informed EEAS diplomat - due to their status as a seconded official from an EU member state - in the context of value mainstreaming more broadly. They described how:

China is moving ...not into aggression, but into assertiveness. Why should they ...after 170 years of humiliation, listen to the foreigners pontificating about how they should run their country?²⁷²

²⁷¹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

²⁷² Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm in Bath.

The interviewee suggests that their EEAS colleagues are not adequately recognising China's sensitivities towards the EU seeking to promote its model and associated values. This again alludes to the pursuit of didactic, non-egalitarian approaches, justified by discourse 5.

Interestingly, one EEAS diplomat suggested that this lack of understanding has been a long-running challenge, having progressed little since working with China in DG External Relations (pre-Lisbon treaty): "I was working with China issues 7 years ago and ...things haven't evolved enormously".²⁷³ The dramatic impasse at the 19th EU-China summit (2017) described in Chapter 7.4, also reinforces the scale and significance of this lack of understanding on both sides. A joint statement failed to be agreed for the second consecutive year, despite these bilateral summits being designed to be relatively depoliticised set-piece events.

8.3 Limited cultural and linguistic knowledge on the EU side

The apparent lack of understanding of China amongst EU officials and its potential linkage to the discourses impeding value mainstreaming, appears to be largely rooted in limited cultural and linguistic knowledge. This deficit on the EU side and its significance are illustrated in sections 8.3.1 and 8.3.2, before Section 8.3.3 addresses its material basis. Notably, many of the examples provided below derive from the aforementioned minority of EU officials who have greater understanding of China and reflexivity. These individuals, which have gained cultural and linguistic knowledge through their own initiative – as opposed to EU training – emphasised their *value-added*. They tended to criticise the lack of these skills amongst their colleagues and linked their absence to ongoing bilateral tensions and misunderstandings. Additionally, the analysis supported the argued connection between a knowledge-gap on the EU side and the discourses justifying a lack of systematic value mainstreaming. Discourses 3-5, surrounding China's perceived role in challenging value mainstreaming, seemed to be particularly fuelled by limited cultural and linguistic knowledge.

²⁷³ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

8.3.1 Cultural knowledge

Concerning cultural knowledge, interviewees alluded to a capacity gap on the EU side and described its profound negative impact on their day-to-day engagement with the Chinese side. Unsurprisingly, cultural knowledge tended to be stronger at the EU delegation in Beijing, than in Brussels, due to these officials being physically based in China and some limited language training (See section 8.3.3). However, it is important to stress that the EU does not provide *any* dedicated cultural training to its officials, irrespective of their institution.²⁷⁴ Consequently, such knowledge relied on the personal experience/initiative of officials.

In a key example, a Commission official from the Information Society Media Section at the delegation highlighted this knowledge-gap amongst their colleagues in the context of China's legal system. They described how:

Cultural knowledge goes a long way there ...we assume that trust and systems should work in the way they do the EU ...[however] Chinese law is way less precise ...I can get angry all day about imprecise laws, but to have this [European] expectation of the governance the law... they don't have this here.²⁷⁵

The official's language infers that limited cultural knowledge on the EU side is leading to incorrect assumptions about China's legal system and its historical precedent ("cultural knowledge goes a long way there"). Aligning with discourse 5, the interviewee appears to allude to a lack of reflexivity on the EU side and a perception that China *should* reform its legal system in accordance with the EU's superior standards ("we assume that trust and systems should work in the way they do the EU"). Relatedly, they also hint at the frustrations this engenders amongst their colleagues and suggest that any resulting didactic approaches to assert EU standards, are likely to be unsuccessful. This is reflected in the notion that if they (or their colleagues) got "angry all day", it would not change the Chinese interpretation of rule of law. The language here also alludes to the pessimism informed by discourse 5 and how it deters value mainstreaming.

The interviewee reaffirmed this connection between discourse 5 and a lack of knowledge amongst EU officials in suggesting that criticising China's legal system according to the

²⁷⁴ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

²⁷⁵ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

EU's standards "will achieve nothing, it is based on a wrong assumption" (i.e. that China's legal system should closely approximate the EU's superior standards).²⁷⁶ More broadly, the interviewee emphasised that this cultural deficit was "definitely worse in Brussels" where people "don't understand the difference between different parts of the Chinese government".²⁷⁷

Supporting this, interviewees also rarely displayed knowledge about the crucial role of informal working relationships - or *guanxi*²⁷⁸ - in building effective relationships with their counterparts, enhancing exchanges and creating a favourable environment for addressing more controversial issues (like values). A DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (GROW) official described how "it is crucial" to have such relationships where "we do feel we have access, we can call them".²⁷⁹ However, they inferred that there was a lack of such awareness amongst their colleagues, noting that "I try also to discuss with colleagues the importance of building up the relationship".²⁸⁰ Similarly, a DG ENV official stated that "If there is no trust, forget it ... [the Chinese side] won't respond to calls, emails".²⁸¹

Additionally, few officials that were interviewed demonstrated knowledge of other key Chinese cultural features such as *maintaining face*, not addressing issues directly and the avoidance of saying *no* to proposals out of politeness, all of which can create tensions in dialogues if misunderstood by the EU side. As two Brussels-based officials (DG TRADE and DG GROW) noted, whom, like their colleagues quoted above, had greater Chinese knowledge:

TRADE: In Chinese culture you never get straight to the point ...they rarely express their desires overtly ...they find it disturbing that we are so direct.²⁸²

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*

²⁷⁸ The term means *connection* in Mandarin and characterises a "system of social networks and influential relationships which facilitate business and other dealings" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018)

²⁷⁹ Interview with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*

²⁸¹ Interview with an official from DG ENV on 08.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

²⁸² Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 15.02.2017 at 4.00pm, in Brussels.

GROW: So you always get a *yes* but it depends on the kind of *yes*, because sometimes *yes* is *no* and sometimes *yes* is *yes* ...whereas we tend to be pretty much straight forward.²⁸³

These examples again suggest a connection between a lack of cultural knowledge and the discourses justifying an avoidance of value mainstreaming. Discourses 3 and 4 in particular, may be partially informed by i) misperceived actions by China or ii) unintentional cultural faux pas by EU officials, which may be catalysing China's obstructive behaviour.

An official from the Trade Section at the EU delegation to China supported these conclusions, describing the consequences of EU officials lacking knowledge about the role of hierarchy in Chinese culture:

It was the minutes of the Chair's meeting, so the highest-level meeting of the Connectivity Platform and ...we discussed the agenda of the meeting. And [in] the agenda, we had added a director, [a] managing director from the EEAS ...so you had the ...European Chair, the Chinese Chair and then this managing director from the EEAS. And they say *no, this is not possible*. And on my side, the EU side, everyone took this as a political issue about the EEAS, like we don't want to have the EEAS there and you know, I [was] telling them *no, no, no* [interviewee laughs] it's not about the EEAS against or not, it's that for them, typically you have a [single] Chair, you have a Chair. And the others are below ...this [is a] matter of levels, you cannot introduce a third element just like that over there ...I was the only one there because of my experience and my knowledge, that understood that it's not a political [issue] and it's just an issue of protocol ...to find the right place where I could place this person, the others, didn't have that kind of reflex[ivity] ...I have gone through this situation, the one I just described, many times.²⁸⁴

The interviewee's language displays how this politically important dialogue - connected to China's Belt and Road Initiative²⁸⁵ - was almost compromised by a lack of cultural

²⁸³ Interview with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

²⁸⁴ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

²⁸⁵ The EU-China Connectivity Platform centres on cooperation on Europe-Asia infrastructure (EU Commission, 2018vii). It largely surrounds attempts to creating synergies between the EU's Trans-European

knowledge. The role of hierarchy on the Chinese side appears to have been totally overlooked by the EU side when compiling their delegation for the dialogue. Similarly, bar the interviewee, even senior officials on the EU side seem to have been unable to identify that China's refusal to approve the agenda was derivative of this elementary cultural dimension ("this [is a] matter of levels, you cannot introduce a third element just like that").

The above example is particularly significant because it highlights that a deficit in cultural knowledge reaches politically significant dialogues and is also prevalent amongst senior EU officials. Moreover, the interviewee explicitly suggests that these sorts of occurrences are not isolated incidents ("I have gone through this situation, the one I just described, many times"). They also allude to the value of cultural knowledge on the EU side, noting that this skill-set was key to resolving the impasse ("I was the only one there because of my experience and my knowledge, that understood").

Relatedly, the example displays how cultural knowledge can lessen or avoid tensions which derive from simple cultural miscommunications, with the interviewee describing how their colleagues immediately became defensive in the wake of China's refusal to approve the agenda ("everyone took this as a political issue"). As a result, a linkage can again be made between a lack of cultural knowledge and the discourses linking to China's behaviour, in this case discourse 3. The example displays how China's reaction to the EU contravening the cultural norm of hierarchy was misinterpreted by many on the EU side as obstructive behaviour.

Importantly, if cultural knowledge appears to aid the mitigation of tensions during relatively uncontroversial technical exchanges, it can be inferred that in the context of mainstreaming EU values, such skills are likely to be of even greater utility. The interviewee quoted above also later described how cultural knowledge made it possible to be more assertive with counterparts. They noted that:

Transport Network (TEN-T) framework and China's Belt and Road initiative. Relevant third countries and external organisations (e.g. development banks) are often included in exchanges (*ibid.*).

Sometimes you can also say, 'look, I'm sick with your rules' because one of the main problems we have is lack of coordination, on the Chinese side ...you cannot just accept and say ok that's the way it is. No, sorry ...if this element is not entirely in your hands, then you have to reach out to that other person, who works [on it] together. For God's sake, because otherwise it's not possible [to move forwards] ...it's about understanding ...not jumping to conclusions, which is what happens when you don't understand the other side ...it's also about pushing them.²⁸⁶

Their language suggests that cultural knowledge has informed them avoiding conflict and misunderstandings with their counterparts ("it's about understanding ...not jumping to conclusions, which is what happens when you don't understand the other side").

However, it also suggests that this knowledge engenders a confidence, giving them the capacity to read their counterparts and know where they can "push" their counterparts without comprising cooperation. This again suggests that such skills may aid value mainstreaming, allowing officials to identify opportunities to discuss values and in a manner which is less likely to cause conflict.

Reinforcing this, officials who had this cultural knowledge also tended to stress its practical value. However, they emphasised that they had gained this knowledge solely through their own personal experience/initiative rather than EU training. As a Brussels-based official from DG GROW stated, "I think it is indispensable, I have studied the Chinese culture on my own, so I believe I know, and I think we all should know that, as China desks". The quote captures how the interviewee considers cultural knowledge a crucial skill for engaging with China ("indispensable"), while inferring that such knowledge is uncommon amongst their colleagues ("I think we all should know that"). Similarly, an official from DG Environment described their knowledge as "a matter of personal interest".

While cultural knowledge tended to be de-facto stronger at the EU delegation in Beijing, a deficit in this area was nonetheless identifiable. Displaying this, one member of local staff (a Chinese national) described how the EU side would use traditional Chinese drawings for logos in public campaigns, which "look strange to the Chinese [people]", but

²⁸⁶ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

“attractive” to EU officials.²⁸⁷ Additionally, they described how in the context of an annual reception at the delegation, their EU colleagues would “delete lower level officials” from the guest list, on the basis that they only want senior Chinese officials to attend.²⁸⁸

The interviewee noted that this was against the advice of local staff, since the Chinese political norm for an event of this status was for senior officials to send lower level colleagues in their place. As a result, the lower level officials *lost face* from not being invited personally. This highlights how EU officials are lacking Chinese cultural knowledge and are making significant cultural faux pas as a result, which are likely to have implications for the bilateral dialogues. It also suggests that there is even cultural misunderstanding between Chinese staff and European officials at the delegation. This appears to reflect a somewhat ironic *microcosm* of the lack of understanding in the bilateral relationship.

Lastly, interviewees from the Chinese side also appeared to allude to the existence and impact of a cultural knowledge-gap on the EU side. Reflecting this, the author asked a scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) about what the EU could learn from China. They stated that “the EU can learn of Chinese culture, a culture of harmony”, before emphasising that China had a “different political culture, different perception[s] about the world”.²⁸⁹ They also described how “we must pay attention to the tinted glasses ...with wrong stereotypes by the Europeans”.²⁹⁰ This appears to hint at a tendency on the EU side not to recognise any alternative Chinese values/standards/practices and their cultural basis, captured by discourse 5. The language also suggests that the EU is viewing China purely from a narrow Eurocentric perspective (“tinted glasses”). Additional examples of a lack of cultural knowledge on the EU side are presented in Table 8.2 below.

²⁸⁷ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 26.05.2017 at 10.00am, in Beijing.

²⁸⁸ *ibid.*

²⁸⁹ Interview with a scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (State Council) on 02.06.2017 10.00am, in Beijing.

²⁹⁰ *ibid.*

Table 8.2 Additional key examples displaying limited cultural knowledge on the EU side

Institution – European Commission European/ External Action Service (EEAS)	Directorate (General)/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
European Commission	DG Energy [BRU]	1. “For them [the Chinese] personal contact is extremely important and once you really bond - it’s difficult because they do have a different mind-set - but if you bond a little bit then they are willing to go a little bit further ...so I think if you can move forward on areas of common ground, if you get a good personal contact ...I could imagine that even maybe in the human rights working group meeting, that if it had another name, then that you can make some progress.” ²⁹¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that establishment of informal personal relations or Guanxi is a crucial prerequisite to productive dialogues (“extremely important”). • Suggests that understanding this and operationalising it can allow officials to make progress in controversial areas. • Infers that it may aid mainstreaming sensitive EU values (“even maybe in the human you can make some progress”). • Language also casts the human rights dialogue as a key example of unproductive dialogue with the Chinese side. Aligns with EU officials invoking the human rights dialogue as a <i>cautionary tale</i> for the consequences of value mainstreaming, linking to discourse 3 (See Chapter 7).

²⁹¹ Interview with an official from DG ENER on 15.02.2017 at 10.00pm, in Brussels.

European Commission	Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	2. “The interviewee described how “certain words in our vocabulary ... [the Chinese side] will approach these ideas in a different way”. They gave the example of civil society and human rights. They added that “the concept of all these things are not the same in China ...These type of gaps (of conceptual understanding) really frustrate discussions.” ²⁹²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays how a lack of cultural knowledge is preventing the EU from effectively discussing human rights with China. • Suggests that both sides conceptualise key words associated with human rights differently. • Highlights the extent of bilateral misunderstanding if both sides are not necessarily speaking about the same things on human rights.
EEAS	GLOBAL Directorate [BRU]	3. “When we make long comments on draft law in China ...it’s the type of comment ...for instance [on] the [Chinese] social order. There is plenty of social order in the Chinese system but it corresponds to something ...it’s a clear notion for [the] Chinese, what social order is. You know, you cannot say what do[es] this bit define? It’s not defined [by China]. This is the reaction we have, but it shows a complete lack of understanding, of Chinese culture.” ²⁹³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that EU officials lack fundamental knowledge about China. • Interviewee explicitly confirms this: “it shows a complete lack of understanding, of Chinese culture” • Displayed by the notion that officials are extensively questioning these basic cultural features on draft Chinese legislation “we make long comments”.

²⁹² Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 31.05.2017 at 12.00pm, in Beijing.

²⁹³ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

European Commission	Trade Section, EU delegation China [BEI]	<p>4. “We were trying to set up a meeting with the Vice-Chairman of [the] NDRC ...who is ministerial level ...we needed to find two hours for the Commissioner to go to [the] NDRC, to the meeting. And a colleague of mine was telling [me]... ‘why doesn’t he come to the convention centre?’ And I say ...‘a minister will never come to a convention centre for an event that his ministry is not organising, just for the sake of having a bilateral meeting ...with a European Commissioner’, no, [it] doesn’t happen. ‘Why doesn’t he come to the hotel for a breakfast?’ A Chinese minister doesn’t go to a hotel for a breakfast ...so, in the end it’s very often about small things like this and you can lose a lot of credibility ...if you make this, this request to the Chinese side ‘why don’t they come to the hotel?’ [its] a face issue isn’t it? ...[And] the Chinese side will say, oh, these guys don’t know anything about China.”²⁹⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays a lack of Chinese cultural knowledge on the EU side and how it is present at the EU delegation as well as in Brussels. • Highlights its negative impact on EU-China relations. • Faux pas in ad-hoc contacts and the organisation of exchanges is likely to impact dialogues.
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²⁹⁴ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

8.3.2 Linguistic knowledge

The analysis suggested that there was an even more profound deficit in the context of linguistic knowledge on the EU side, being rare not only in Brussels, but Beijing. These skills arguably contribute and empower cultural knowledge, aiding officials in understanding and building relationships with their counterparts as well as their confidence to assert objectives.

It emerged that the language training made available to EU officials compared poorly to other major diplomatic actors (including large member states), restricted solely to those at the EU delegation and even then, being small-scale and voluntary in nature.²⁹⁵ As a result, EU officials were overwhelmingly found to have minimal or no proficiency in this area, with skills again largely dependent upon the personal experience/initiative of the official in question. Interestingly, there was an identifiable disparity between those lacking language skills who considered them of little practical importance, particularly versus cultural knowledge, and those who had such skills viewing them as quasi-indispensable.

Reflecting on this, an official from the Information Society Media Section at the EU delegation described the EU's deficiency in this area as "a relative weakness" and noted that "cultural-linguistic knowledge amongst diplomats [was] limited" whereas if you looked at the US, Russia or the UK the situation was different.²⁹⁶ Focusing on the UK, they described how diplomats got a "two-year programme" whereas they were offered "60 one-to-one lessons", but they could only do a fraction of these lessons in practice as "they were busy".²⁹⁷ This combination of minimal training provision and an expectation to undertake it on top of challenging, understaffed posts at the delegation was reinforced by a member of local staff from the delegation. They suggested that EU officials rarely completed more than a small amount of the available lessons.²⁹⁸

The extent of this capacity-gap on the EU side was compounded by a diplomat from the British Embassy in Beijing. They described how the two-year training given to UK diplomats in Beijing was *compulsory*, provided on a one-to-one basis and undertaken in

²⁹⁵ Interview with officials from the European Commission on 18.05.2017 at 4.00pm and 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

²⁹⁶ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing

²⁹⁷ *ibid.*

²⁹⁸ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 26.05.2017 at 10.00am, in Beijing.

isolation before diplomats even began their posts.²⁹⁹ It emerged in other interviews that France and Germany, making up “the big three”³⁰⁰ EU member states with the UK, also provided similarly extensive training to their diplomats.

Reinforcing this skill deficit on the EU side, one Brussels-based official noted that “few of us read Chinese, I don’t”³⁰¹, while the EU’s Climate change desk – a crucial post in EU-China relations – described in an interview with the DG Environment official publication *Environment for Europeans*, that they’d “love to learn Chinese properly” (EU Commission, 2016iv). This emphasises that despite the offer of language tuition, busy officials have little capacity to take the classes and *properly* develop their skills, unlike their colleagues from large member states.

Importantly, numerous officials highlighted the negative effect that this deficit in Chinese language skills was having on EU diplomacy and by extension, value mainstreaming. A Beijing-based official from DG Trade described how, “we are in an absurd situation” and like their colleague from the Information and Media section, lamented EU training “compared to the investment of the UK or the US”.³⁰² Notably, they added that “I’m not sure if it would solve our problems... but it’ll help us know where we are”.³⁰³

Their language suggests that although they do not consider language training a *panacea* for EU-China relations, they consider it an important (missing) asset for aiding exchanges. The interviewee also alludes to the extent of the EU’s lack of understanding of China - they are unsure about status/quality of bilateral relations - and infers that these skills would help resolve this (it’ll help us know where we are”).

Supporting these inferences, the interviewee added that “you can do a lot with interpreters and local staff... [but] I miss the immediacy” and noted that “I’d like to read Xi’s speeches [in Mandarin]”, because the Chinese meanings of words differ from the “meanings we think they have”.³⁰⁴ Reflecting upon their comments, the interviewee stated, “I think we can do better”.³⁰⁵ The language again points to a capacity deficit on

²⁹⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at the British Embassy in Beijing on 14.06.2017 at 10.00am.

³⁰⁰ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm in Bath.

³⁰¹ Interview with an official from DG CLIMA on 16.02.2017 at 9.30am, in Brussels.

³⁰² Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

³⁰³ *ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *ibid.*

³⁰⁵ *ibid.*

the EU side which is impinging upon EU-China relations, with the EU side potentially misunderstanding China's interpretation of words/concepts/ideas. This once again reinforces the idea that discourses 3 and 4 could be partly informed by misperceived obstruction by China.

Interestingly, a number of officials lacking linguistic skills tended to downplay their value on the basis that interpreters were present at dialogues. As one official from the delegation's Political, Press and Information Section noted:

It is not 100% necessary and anyway in official meetings you go with the interpreter ...you don't really have the possibility to mingle with [interlocutors], in the social sense.³⁰⁶

However, officials who did have these skills tended to challenge this view, emphasising their crucial role during dialogues in mitigating misunderstandings. As an official from the Trade Section at the delegation stated:

I'm very often stricken by... after meeting with the Chinese, the interpretation of my colleagues, what they have said is very different from my interpretation and I think that's because of the knowledge and that's because also of even the interpretation because you see, I see quite often, the English translation of Chinese concepts.³⁰⁷

Here, the interviewee emphasises the utility of cultural and linguistic language, suggesting that in the absence of such knowledge, their colleagues are frequently (i.e. "very often") coming out of dialogues with incorrect understandings of China's positions/perspectives. In this sense, their colleagues are cast as being ill-equipped to effectively engage with China, as even with Mandarin-English interpretation, meaning is being *lost in translation* and linguistic and cultural knowledge is necessary to acquire a full understanding.

Another EEAS diplomat also emphasised how linguistic skills tangibly enhanced dialogues and the pursuit of favourable outcomes by the EU side. They stated that "I think it does make a difference when you speak their language", describing how, coupled with cultural knowledge, it "gets you respect" and builds informal *guanxi* relationships.³⁰⁸ They added

³⁰⁶ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 26.05.2017 at 10.00am, in Beijing.

³⁰⁷ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

³⁰⁸ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm in Bath.

that with this *guanxi* established, your counterparts will subtly “let you know what’s really the score” if the Chinese side is playing *hard ball* and discreetly whisper to you “look this is off the record, I’m speaking to you personally”.³⁰⁹ They added that “you’re never going to get there without the language” and that, with regard to the EU not providing linguistic training for officials “I think they’ve got it wrong”.³¹⁰

Mirroring conclusions surrounding the utility of cultural knowledge, if language skills are generally fulfilling the role of reducing misunderstandings and aiding compromise in dialogues, it can be inferred that such skills would be of particular utility to the discussion of controversial EU values. Misinterpretation in these sensitive discussions could mean the difference between finding common ground and dialogue collapse.

Additionally, it appears that linguistic skills contribute to cultural knowledge in boosting confidence and assertiveness on the EU side, creating a capacity to judge the likely impact of actions. One Beijing-based DG ENV official involved with a cooperation programme, described how their skills and the relationships they engendered, allowed them to pursue potentially controversial environmental rights without causing controversy. They noted that:

Because I sort of know how to walk the walk and talk the talk. I think I can get away with a lot more ...I get generally a lot more trust, therefore I can get more done.³¹¹

Overall, it appears that a deficit in linguistic knowledge, as well as cultural knowledge, can be linked with the *China’s role* discourses impeding value mainstreaming. It may be informing misperceived obstruction by China or catalysing such conduct by interlocutors through EU faux pas (discourses 3 and 4). Similarly, misunderstandings may be contributing to a lack of reflexivity on the EU side and the didactic approaches to value mainstreaming it informs (discourse 5). An additional key example reinforcing the importance of linguistic skills to EU-China dialogues is presented in Table 8.3.

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*

³¹⁰ *ibid.*

³¹¹ Phone Interview with an official from the European Commission based in Beijing on 23.06.2015 at 4.00pm (CST), from Bath.

Table 8.3. Additional key example displaying limited linguistic skills on the EU side

Commission Directorate General and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
DG Environment (ENV) [BEI]	<p>It makes a huge difference [being able to speak Mandarin]. It makes a huge difference ...for example my Chinese [counterpart] ...I couldn't communicate with him the way I do ...if I didn't speak Chinese and I talk with him all the time and we can have one-on-ones ...it's not just speaking mandarin, it's also understanding how these people think and how to deal with them ...it's a whole cultural thing right?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasises the value of linguistic skills in EU-China relations. • Displays how linguistic skills complement and empower cultural knowledge ("it's a whole cultural thing right"). • Appears to strongly aid the crucial building of informal working relations (<i>guanxi</i>) with Chinese counterparts.

8.3.3 Limited cultural and linguistic knowledge: A question of resources?

Importantly, interviewees also provided insights into *why* the cultural and linguistic knowledge on the EU side was so limited – a question of resources. As one Commission official noted “cultural-linguistic knowledge amongst diplomats [is] limited at the delegation ...partly because we lack resources”.³¹² Similarly, it emerged that in Brussels, (voluntary) language training options had been rescinded over time, described by a DG ENV official as being “a matter of cost ...up to a few years ago, we could learn any language”.³¹³

In this sense, for the EU to equip its officials, particularly those based in Beijing, with similar capacity to those from larger EU member states like the UK, it would necessitate a large investment. This appears to be problematic for several key reasons. Most explicitly, the EU’s budget is under perpetual pressure by the member states which fund and approve it. Foreign policy is primarily a member state competence and at the EU-level, it is considered by them to be a question of *value-added* as opposed to a delegation of authority (the sectors of trade, climate change and development reflect notable exceptions). As a result, EU delegations also have vastly reduced staff versus those of larger member states’ embassies: the EU delegation to China has 140 staff,³¹⁴ whereas the UK has one embassy and four consulates, employing thousands across China (FCO, 2018).³¹⁵

Additionally, there appears to be an enduring assumption that diplomats seconded to the EEAS from member states, who do have these skills, can plug this capacity gap at the EU level, particularly in the delegations. As one official noted, “our Mandarin expertise, mostly we draw from the national foreign policy services”.³¹⁶ Notably, EU officials often emphasised the capacity of their seconded colleagues to achieve more in EU-China relations, which reaffirms the value of these skills, which most EU officials lack.³¹⁷ While it is important recognise that these individuals, as well as the minority of EU officials with greater knowledge, will to some extent *pass on* their experience, this is arguably sub-

³¹² Interview with an official from the European Commission on 18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

³¹³ Interview with an official from DG ENV on 08.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

³¹⁴ Consists of 70 European staff and 70 local staff.

³¹⁵ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm in Bath.

³¹⁶ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

³¹⁷ Interview with officials from the European Commission on 26.05.2017 at 10.00am and 09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

optimal. Examples in this chapter suggest that such background dynamics are not tangibly improving understanding of China amongst EU officials.

The last two factors that make enhancing cultural-linguistic training problematic are more systemic. Firstly, the EU's external action is complicated by the fact that the European Commission, which is responsible for most dialogues, is not a foreign service - unlike the EEAS – which are the institutions allocated such training for other international actors.³¹⁸ Secondly, EU institutional career structures cultivate generalists that typically rotate between countries/regions in their portfolios every four years as opposed to the country-specific specialists trained by member states like the UK.³¹⁹ In the case of the latter, the expectation is that the state is making an investment in officials, which will *pay-off* through multiple postings in that country throughout their career.³²⁰ It is worth highlighting that the Chinese side also differs from the EU in training specialists in its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), emphasising the relative weakness of the EU vis-à-vis international actors of comparable calibre, in this respect.³²¹

For the EU, making such a high investment in individuals who will not necessarily use these skills beyond their post is comparably problematic. As one EEAS diplomat stated, “we don't stay in our posts long enough, to make the investment in foreign languages”.³²² Language training is also partially complicated by EU officials already being multilingual as a prerequisite for employment,³²³ unlike their colleagues from member states. In this sense, they are already expected to have learned multiple languages to secure posts and may be resistant to institutional pressure to learn more. This is not to mention a perception amongst some EU officials that the career-flexibility offered by their generalist skill-set is attractive (i.e. not restricting them to one country).³²⁴

Nevertheless, several interviewees emphasised the need for reforming the existing system. The diplomat quoted above added that it was time to “stop the merry-go-round” (four-year rotations) on specific issues, particularly to foster “instilment, memory,

³¹⁸ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

³¹⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

³²⁰ 3-4 year spans in a country before a similar length posting at HQ is normal to prevent nativism and allow career progression.

³²¹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm in Bath.

³²² Interview with a diplomat from EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

³²³ EU officials are required to have “thorough knowledge of one of the official EU languages (Level C1) and satisfactory knowledge of a second (Level B2) official EU language” (EU EPSO, 2018).

³²⁴ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 22.05.2017 at 12.30pm, in Beijing.

continuity” in priority areas with China such as human rights, security and multilateralism (encompassing human rights) creating “real experts”.³²⁵ This once more reinforces the linkage between cultural-linguistic capacity and effective value mainstreaming.

Other interviewees maintained that even a very modest compulsory training course, particularly in Chinese culture and institutional systems would make a large difference. As one official from the Trade Section at the EU delegation noted:

We lack expertise and I do think that anyone coming should receive a good ...week long training or two weeks training ...but I mean language, ok, I understand ...it’s a lot of money and the Americans or the Brits, they put a lot of money into that and I think, some people say that it’s too much money and that it’s wasted in a way. I can disagree, but I understand it’s a lot of money. But... a simple two-week training, full day, ten full days, only on China, China’s system, how it works, what it is, what it means, how to understand about the Chinese you know this is, I’m talking about, what? 80 hours? 80 full hours of training on China before you come here and work with the Chinese. That’s the minimum.³²⁶

The interviewee reaffirms the Chinese knowledge deficit on the EU side, suggesting that “we lack expertise” at the delegation and that “anyone” posted at the delegation should receive training, alluding to the absence of such skills. The extent of this deficit is emphasised by them describing how their colleagues need to be taught basic knowledge about China (i.e. “how it works, what it is, what it means”) and that this capacity reflects the “minimum”, that EU officials currently lack. It is also reinforced by the interviewee prescribing such a modest training program for officials which addresses elementary information about Chinese systems and culture (“a simple two-week training ...I’m talking about, what, 80 hours?”). While the example is focused solely on the capacity-gap at the EU delegation to China, it can be inferred that if these skills are so essential for engaging with China on the ground, then they are crucial also for Brussels-based officials.

Supporting these conclusions, an EEAS diplomat described how a month-long course “would be extremely useful to them [officials], [and] stop them making unmentionable mistakes”.³²⁷ The notion of “unmentionable mistakes”, infers that cultural faux pas are

³²⁵ Interview with a diplomat from EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

³²⁶ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

³²⁷ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm in Bath.

tangibly impacting dialogues with China. Like their Commission colleague above, the interviewee also emphasised basic cultural knowledge as a bare-minimum. They noted how “I wouldn’t bother with the language” but “at least pronounce the names right ...few things upset the Chinese more than foreigners pronouncing their names wrong”.³²⁸ Similarly they stated that “it’s useful to understand the government system, guanxi ... the pressures of your counterparts” and their “educational background”.³²⁹ Their language once more reaffirms just how severe the knowledge gap is amongst many on the EU side .

8.4 Caveats – qualifying the impact of improved Chinese cultural and linguistic knowledge on EU value mainstreaming

The analysis throughout this chapter has suggested that a lack of understanding of China amongst EU officials is weakening the EU’s normative power and potentially contributing to the discourses justifying an avoidance of systematic value mainstreaming. However, it is important to stress that the effects of improving these skills on the EU side would likely be tempered by several significant caveats.

Firstly, as mentioned earlier in the chapter and reflected in EU and Chinese policy documents, the lack of understanding is *mutual* in nature, applying to both sides. China should also be enhancing the European knowledge of their officials to counter Sinocentrism, adjusting their practices to avoid misunderstandings with the EU. In a cultural context, this includes being more direct and clearer about their positions – for example saying *yes* and *no* definitively – as well as having greater understanding and patience with the alternative social and diplomatic norms practiced by EU officials. Concerning language, while English proficiency is more common amongst Chinese officials than vice-versa, particularly amongst younger officials and extending beyond the MoFA specialists,³³⁰ greater efforts could be made to further enhance this capacity on the Chinese side.

More profoundly, irrespective of improvements in cultural and linguistic skills on either side, Chinese officials’ working practices will still reflect a serious impediment to value

³²⁸ *ibid.*

³²⁹ *ibid.*

³³⁰ *ibid.*

mainstreaming. On a broad level, building meaningful relationships is limited by a tendency amongst Chinese interlocutors to avoid social contact with EU officials - classed as *foreigners* - out with the official setting. As an official from the Science and Technology Section at the EU delegation stated:

It doesn't matter... how good your Chinese is, if you are not Chinese you cannot get this sort of [relationship] ...I find the Chinese ...maybe it is their culture, [or] the fact that they were very closed for a long time, they are not used to working with foreigners.³³¹

Mirroring this, many officials described how their counterparts would not socialise with them beyond dialogues (even in the context of working lunches etc.), an attribute which is likely impeding the formation of *guanxi*. Additionally, as described in Chapter 7.3 in the context of discourse 4, Chinese working practices within dialogues pose an even greater challenge for EU officials. In particular, the tendency of Chinese interlocutors to strictly stick to pre-agreed agendas, leaves little room for cultural or linguistic skills to improve discussion of values, unless such issues are explicitly featured in the agenda (which is rare, bar the human rights dialogue). As a Commission official from the Economic and Finance section at the delegation noted:

There is a very good chemistry between the Vice-Premier ...and our Vice-President, who are the main counterparts in our High-Level Economic Dialogue [HED] ...but [the Chinese Vice-Premier] comes in and he has ...his scripted speech and I think there is really nothing new ...so there is no dynamic in this discussion, there is very little which comes out, except really negotiations and vision of course, but when you don't have negotiations you just talk.³³²

The interviewee suggests that irrespective of high-quality relations between officials, the dialogues remain very static, reflecting an environment which deters mainstreaming amongst officials (captured by discourse 4). Their language infers that the HED has little room for anything bar negotiations on economic issues of interest to both sides ("there is very little which comes out, except really negotiations and vision").

³³¹ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 23.05.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

³³² Interview with an official from the European Commission on 18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

Beyond this, it is also crucial to highlight that the impasse over PPD described in Section 8.2, is also strongly, perhaps even predominantly rooted in China's institutional practices (i.e. highly centralised top-down governance), as opposed to an incapacity on the EU side to build mutual understanding.

The above quote also importantly hints at another crucial aspect impacting value mainstreaming, which is unaffected by the cultural-linguistic knowledge of either side – the personalities in the room. The relationship between the Chinese Vice-Premier and EU Vice-President co-chairing the HED may be one purely based on personal rapport, as opposed to cultural or linguistic knowledge. In this sense, the outcome of dialogues is also informed by the social skills of the officials on each side and the resulting relationship.

Supporting this, an official from DG ENV outlined how it was “difficult to find common ground for discussions” in the ministerial-level Environmental Policy Dialogue “which is a pity”, due to a lack of rapport between the EU Commissioner and the Chinese minister co-chairing the exchanges.³³³ They described how the “two personalities don't get on”, partly due to one individual being from a technical background the other being a politician.³³⁴ Similarly, the Commission official from the Economic and Finance Section quoted above described how the rigid working practices of the Chinese side were intensified when there was a poor rapport between interlocutors (unlike the HED), noting that:

I've seen this when the, when the chemistry is not working well, then this thing is even worse, there is nothing, there is really only reading, reading, reading and then bye-bye.³³⁵

Additionally, the author has observed that EU officials working with EU-China human rights promotion tend to be very passionate about the value. This arguably intensifies a lack of reflexivity on the EU side, contributing to them being much more assertive with China and thus partial towards the didactic mainstreaming approaches associated with discourse 5. Officials with less professional and emotional investment in human rights may be inherently more restrained, reflexive and potentially more effective in their approach. Somewhat counter-intuitively, it seems that assigning these portfolios to

³³³ Interview with an official from DG ENV on 08.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

³³⁴ *ibid.*

³³⁵ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

officials which strongly believe in human rights may be detrimental to improving the EU's human rights agenda with China. In all of the examples above regarding the role of personality, it is unclear whether greater cultural-linguistic knowledge on each side would improve the quality of exchanges.

Beyond the role of the Chinese side and *personalities in the room*, it is important to qualify the impact of enhanced cultural-linguistic knowledge to value mainstreaming, through focusing on the track-record of large member states. While, as noted in Chapter 3.7, there is a tendency amongst member states to compartmentalise value-related issues to the EU level, the *big three* (UK, France and Germany), which *do* provide their diplomats with cultural-linguistic skills, also actively promote EU values, particularly via human rights dialogues. However, these states have not made major breakthroughs to date, despite their enhanced skill set vis-à-vis the EU.

8.5 Conclusions

This chapter has displayed how a lack of understanding of China amongst EU officials may be contributing to the weakness of the EU's normative power and the discourses informing it. In this sense, not only is systematic value mainstreaming not taking place in line with EU's official discourse found documents and the ideal-type of NPE, but the EU side has been unable to adjust its strategy for value promotion to the *China context*.

The analysis throughout this chapter suggested that this fundamental lack of understanding of China, reinforced by EU and Chinese policy documents, is rooted in limited Chinese cultural and linguistic knowledge on the EU side. While this knowledge-gap and the Eurocentrism it informs, seemingly afflicts EU-China relations in a holistic sense, it appears to be particularly pertinent to value mainstreaming, where the subject matter is sensitive and misunderstandings more likely and higher impact.

This was reflected in the accounts of officials which did have these skills due to personal experience/initiative. They demonstrated greater reflexivity and were able to both avoid misunderstandings and be more assertive in promoting EU objectives with their counterparts. In effect, they could *read* their counterparts and pitch discussion points in a manner less likely to engender conflict.

The impact of these skills on the EU's normative power with China was also reflected in an apparent connection between a lack of cultural-linguistic knowledge amongst officials and the discourses justifying an avoidance of systematic mainstreaming, particularly discourses 3-5. The analysis inferred that misperceived Chinese intransigence as well as EU cultural faux pas, fostering obstructive behaviour by the Chinese side, may be contributing to discourse 3. Similarly, a lack of knowledge about China's institutional systems may be exaggerating the genuine opacity of China's structures, intensifying the deterrence effect to value mainstreaming of discourse 4. Lastly, the lack of reflexivity and counterproductive value mainstreaming approaches associated with discourse 5 (*China is not listening to the EU and it should be*) may be also be informed by a lack of knowledge about China's alternative interpretations of values and historical/cultural basis of this.

This connection to discourses 3-5 suggested that insufficient knowledge of Chinese culture and language was informing EU officials engaging with China on a Eurocentric basis, which was negative to EU-China dialogues, particularly in the context of finding common ground on controversial values. However, the chapter also importantly qualified this through emphasising that the lack of understanding was mutual in nature, with comparably problematic Sinocentrism on the Chinese side. In the absence of sufficient knowledge and understanding, ethnocentrism was argued to represent the *default position* for each side.

While not identifiable in the examples throughout this chapter, a speculative link could also be made between the lack of understanding and the two organisational discourses. A lack of confidence, based on limited cultural-linguistic knowledge, about *how* to pitch value mainstreaming with China, may be contributing to a perception that 1) values implicitly feature in EU-China dialogues and 2) values are not relevant to officials' specific sectors.

Reflecting these arguments, a lack of understanding on the EU side appears to represent an additional and perhaps crucial causal factor in the practical implementation of the EU's normative power with China, contributing to the discourses identified throughout this thesis. However, as section 8.4 highlighted, resolving this issue is problematic, as even if the EU enhances the skills of its officials, the lack of understanding is also underpinned by factors out with its control. Being mutual in nature, its remediation also necessitates actions by China to improve the European knowledge of their officials and tackle their

default Sinocentrism, as well as adjustments to Chinese working practices. Moreover, the important role of the personalities of officials on each side and the relationships between them, is beyond the control of either side.

Chapter 9 - Value mainstreaming practices and their limitations

9.1 Introduction

Chapters 6-8 suggest that EU officials are not *systematically* mainstreaming values into EU-China dialogues, in line with the official discourse found in documents and the ideal-type of NPE. This appears to be legitimised by five key discourses and a potentially interrelated lack of understanding of China. However, this thesis also identified value mainstreaming activities which *are* taking place in EU-China dialogues. These are crucial to acknowledge and assess, significantly highlighting how values do underpin EU-China dialogues and thus the existence of the EU's normative power with China.

In this context, Section 9.2 introduces the concept of *partial mainstreaming*, which captures how EU values are sporadically featuring in dialogues by virtue of them being pre-built into each sector of cooperation with China. The analysis suggests that these *partial* efforts are limited in scope versus systematic actions to fully realise the ideal-type of NPE. Moreover, they appear to be enabled/tolerated by diplomats from the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Section 9.3 describes the other notable mainstreaming activity taking place: the ad-hoc efforts by EEAS diplomats to coordinate value mainstreaming amongst their Commission officials. Like partial mainstreaming, these activities appear to be limited, in comparison to systematic actions to realise value mainstreaming, with such dimensions not necessarily included in these ad-hoc interinstitutional communications or discussed in an explicit manner.

However, Section 9.4 provides deeper insight into these dynamics. It emerges that the EEAS's logistical capacity and most pertinently, interinstitutional tensions with the Commission, are limiting its potential to coordinate systematic value mainstreaming. This also provides an alternative explanation for EEAS's apparent enabling or active reproduction of the discourses legitimising a lack of systematic mainstreaming, described in chapters 6-7.

9.2. Partial mainstreaming

Concerning partial mainstreaming, which captures how EU values are being sporadically tabled during dialogues despite a lack of systematic practices, some additional clarifications are required. Firstly, this phenomenon appears to derive from EU values already being to some extent *pre-built* into many policy sectors of EU-China dialogues. This can be observed in the implicit or explicit references to EU values in these sectors' guiding documents. For example, the Commission's *Trade for all* (2015) strategy describes how:

The EU's trade and investment policy must respond to consumers' concerns by reinforcing corporate social responsibility initiatives and due diligence across the production chain with a focus on the respect of human rights and the social – including labour rights – and environmental aspects of value chains". (EU Commission, 2015iii:20)

The quote displays how discussion of corporate social responsibility, including labour and environmental standards takes place in trade dialogues with third countries. These areas are underpinned by human rights and sustainable development, meaning that if they are discussed by officials, value mainstreaming is indirectly taking place, irrespective of whether they have consciously made these connections when operationalising the dialogue. As labour and environmental standards have technical as well as normative dimensions, these issues are particularly prone to being partially mainstreamed, without any consideration of their value implications.

Documents guiding People-to-People Dialogues, also reflect this pre-built role of EU values. The *follow-up actions* found in the *High-level People-to-People Dialogue second round* (2014) document describes how:

The two parties will regularly discuss the latest developments on specific aspects of gender equality including economic empowerment for women, women's political participation, violence against women and work life balance. (EU Commission, 2014iv:4)

In this case, the discussion of women's rights in these dialogues reflects a facet of human rights, meaning that every time this area is raised with China, EU officials are de-facto

mainstreaming human rights, even if they are not framing it as such. Additional key examples from documents underpinning other sectors of EU-China relations can be seen in Table 9.1 below.

Table 9.1 Additional key examples of EU values being pre-built into sectors of EU-China cooperation

Authoring Commission Directorate General	Name of document	Example reference to value(s)
DG Communications Networks, Content and Technology (CONNECT)	EU-China-Joint-White- Paper-on-the-Internet- of-Things (2016)	Human rights (Freedom of expression): “The development of IoT [internet of things] may also raise privacy concerns since smart objects will collect more and new kinds of data, including personal data, and exchange data automatically, which may lead to a perception of loss of control by citizens. IoT may further provoke ethical questions pertaining in particular to individuals’ autonomy, accountability for objects behaviour, or the precautionary principle.” (EU Commission, 2016v:9)
N/A	Belt and Road Forum – EU common messages (2017) (Informs the EU-China Connectivity Platform)	Human rights, rule of law and sustainable development: “We have also learned a lot about how to assess the impact of infrastructure projects on the environment and on the local communities who will be most directly affected. It is our responsibility to put this into practice for future projects and not repeat the mistakes of the past. Fulfilling the commitments of the Paris Agreement provides Asia and Europe with countless opportunities to invent new and better ways to produce, consume, invest and trade, in full synergy with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. Sustainability assessment must include all aspects: economic viability, fiscal sustainability, climate and environment-friendly and social sustainability.” (EU, 2017) A level-playing field for trade and investment based on full adherence to market rules and international norms is a critical condition if we want to maintain the political momentum for better connectivity in Asia and between Europe and Asia – and reap the full benefits. (EU, 2017)

DG Energy (ENER)	EU-China Roadmap on energy cooperation (2016-2020),	Sustainable development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Against the background of multiple challenges related to addressing climate change, environmental degradation and energy security and changing market conditions, China and the European Union have a mutual interest and role to promote low-carbon development, protect the environment, address climate change and encourage clean energy development (EU Commission, 2017iv:1)
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It also is important to differentiate partial mainstreaming from the *systematic value mainstreaming* promoted by the EU's official discourse found in documents, which aligns with the ideal-type of NPE and broader definitions of mainstreaming in academia and policymaking circles (See Chapter 6.2.3). The standards encompassed by the official discourse would see officials from the Commission and the EEAS systematically identifying the normative dimensions of their dialogues and ensuring that they feature in all exchanges. However, in practice, we find that EU values are entering dialogues *sporadically* and not featuring in every exchange.

Moreover, officials appear to be often unaware of the presence of these value dimensions in dialogues, due to the absence of systematic attempts to operationalise them. Partial mainstreaming thus inherently leads to pertinent value dimensions being left unaddressed. Reflecting these features, partial mainstreaming prevents officials from fully exploiting the normative aspects of their dialogues directly or indirectly with China. The scope of these partial efforts is therefore dramatically limited versus systematic value mainstreaming, which can fully realise the EU's normative power in EU-China dialogues.

Beyond this, it is also crucial to make the distinction between partial mainstreaming and the implied ideal *end-point* of value mainstreaming (described in Chapter 6.2.3), wherein systematic activities are so well ingrained that officials plan and raise EU values with third countries, without requiring formal systematic mechanisms to do so. Partial mainstreaming is distinct from this in capturing how officials are not carrying out systematic actions, having had no entrenched experience of doing so over time. In effect, the ideal end-point of mainstreaming, requires the existence of institutionalised mechanisms, which then melt away and systematic actions become *second nature*. This seems to be unattainable in EU-China dialogues until such systematic practices are institutionalised.

Additionally, it is worth highlighting that EU values being pre-built into EU-China dialogues may not only be informing partial mainstreaming, but the prevalence of discourse 1 amongst officials. The role of values in guiding sectoral policy documents/communications may be contributing to a perception amongst officials that EU values passively feature in their activities and thus no further actions are required to realise them with China.

Examples of partial mainstreaming could be identified across all three pillars of EU-China dialogues and present in the accounts of both Brussels and Beijing-based officials working for the EEAS and the European Commission. Aligning with conclusions in Chapters 6-7, that the EEAS was enabling or actively reproducing the discourses justifying a lack of systematic value mainstreaming, the EEAS appeared to tolerate and thus enable partial mainstreaming in Commission-led dialogues.

Pillars 2 & 3: Trade dialogues

Some of the strongest examples of partial mainstreaming were identifiable in EU-China trade dialogues where human rights, rule of law and sustainable development appeared to feature indirectly in dialogues despite a lack of systematic efforts. Regarding rule of law, which is considered to be an enabler of human rights by the EU, one DG Trade (TRADE) official noted that, “we are quite focused on [rule of law]” but “we don’t frame it internally as rule of law”.³³⁶

The interviewee’s language infers that rule of law is appearing in trade dialogues, but this is not a product of systematic activities. This is reflected in the suggestion that rule of law is often not being discussed *by name* behind the scenes directly (“we don’t frame it internally as rule of law”). Instead, it can be inferred that DG TRADE officials are largely focusing on the extent to which China is adhering to WTO and free market principles, issues which, while linked to the economic dimensions of rule of law, are not being internally recognised as *value aspects* of EU-China trade dialogues and systematically mainstreamed accordingly.

This emphasises the limited capacity of partial mainstreaming to realise the EU’s normative power, versus systematic actions. Connections between the sector-specific substance and rule of law are not being fully exploited with China to further discuss the value. Notably, the social dimension of rule of law, most directly connected to human rights, appears to be being neglected altogether in the context of these partial efforts.

The interviewee also appears to recognise and accept the existence of partial mainstreaming, effectively explaining to the author that the lack of systematic activities to realise EU values is normal/natural. This seems to support the speculated connection

³³⁶ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 10.03.2017 at 3.00pm, in Brussels.

between partial mainstreaming and discourse 1, with the interviewee seemingly satisfied that rule of law is being operationalised without any explicit efforts to realise it.

Reinforcing these inferences, the interviewee elaborated that:

We certainly do mention rule of law...but quite often we are dealing with so many issues [like] overcapacity, market economy status.... the EU wants to discuss a lot of laws.³³⁷

Their language reaffirms, quite decisively, that rule of law related issues *are* being included in their dialogues. Interestingly, they also infer that rule of law may be being occasionally raised explicitly - by name - with the Chinese side. However, because there does not appear to be any efforts to systematically mainstream the value into these dialogues, explicit discussion of it seems to be seldom taking place. This is reflected in the interviewee suggesting that rule of law is somewhat buried by sector-specific priorities (“quite often we are dealing with so many issues”). Moreover, making connections with the first example, the language alludes to a situation where rule of law is only being explicitly mentioned due to its perceived status as an enabler of EU economic standards, as opposed to a multidimensional EU value to be promoted with the Chinese side, which has connections to human rights.

Significantly, the sector-specific issues cast as dominating the agenda at the expense of rule of law (“overcapacity, market economy status”), also support the existence of partial mainstreaming. These areas have profound rule of law dimensions, reinforcing the notion that the value is sporadically bleeding into exchanges in an indirect fashion, irrespective of a lack of systematic mainstreaming activities or even recognition of such by officials. This is supported by the interviewee inferring that rule of law is effectively encompassed by the EU asserting its economic standards with China (“the EU wants to discuss a lot of laws”).

It is also worth highlighting that partial mainstreaming of rule of law in EU-China trade dialogues appears to be also partly informed by an institutionalised perception that the value’s economic dimension should be disentangled from its more social/human dimensions. As one Beijing-based DG TRADE official noted “rule of law is not just a value question... it is a business question”.³³⁸ Similarly, an EEAS diplomat from the delegation

³³⁷ *ibid.*

³³⁸ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

described how their colleagues from the Trade section dealt with “rule of law from a material interests angle” and that the value dimension probably “did not even cross their minds” and was “not their job”. This a) alludes to how the EEAS tolerates partial mainstreaming and b) reaffirms the institution’s role in enabling the discourses justifying a lack of systematic value mainstreaming. Discourse 2 is also invoked in the interviewee’s suggestion that value mainstreaming is *not the job* of their DG TRADE colleagues.³³⁹

Additional examples of partial mainstreaming in trade dialogues were also identifiable in the context of sustainable development and human rights. Regarding sustainable development, a Beijing-based DG TRADE official described how it represented the sole EU value applicable to their sector (displaying discourse 2) and reflected “a clear part of the [comprehensive] investment agreement [CIA]”³⁴⁰ with China. This example is interesting, as the interviewee recognises the role of the value in exchanges, but as opposed to it being systematically designed into all trade dialogues, it is cast as being isolated to the CIA. Crucially, even in this context, the implication is that the only reason it is being promoted is because it has been pre-designed into the EU’s rulebook for free trade agreements (FTAs).

Notably, the sustainable development chapter of the CIA, like all contemporary EU FTAs, also includes human rights dimensions (encompassed by the social dimension of sustainable development), displaying how human rights is also being partially mainstreamed via the CIA. This is reinforced by the interviewee not appearing to identify this value dimension of the CIA with the Chinese side, suggesting it is being indirectly mainstreamed during negotiations.

Additionally, it emerged that China’s 2015 Cyber Security Law had been raised in trade dialogues, with concerns raised about the privacy of employees working for European businesses in China. However, despite this being connected to individual civil and political rights, EU officials did not appear to be framing this as a question of mainstreaming human rights. This was reflected in one interviewee’s response to a question about whether the EU had threatened economic repercussions for this Chinese law, based on human rights concerns. They noted that “I’m not sure we do the linkage in that way”.³⁴¹

³³⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm in Bath.

³⁴⁰ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

³⁴¹ Interview with an official from DG TRADE on 10.03.2017 at 3.00pm, in Brussels.

While this may allude to the EU not applying economic conditionality to China on the issue, it also hints at how DG TRADE officials are not making the connections between their concerns and their human rights dimensions. As result, the value appears to be being partially mainstreamed with China.

Pillars 2 & 3: Employment and Social dialogues

Other key examples of partial mainstreaming could be identified in the context of employment and social affairs dialogues, where much of the sector-specific substance passively connects to human rights. An official from DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL) described how they addressed rights “that don’t threaten the regime” and that “civil and political rights are not discussed” in dialogues with China.³⁴² However, they also described how one of their recent dialogues had focused on the theme of *employment regulations* which involved discussion of how “to improve free speech in the workplace”.³⁴³ They added that this was not “not the same sensitivity as individual civil and political rights”.³⁴⁴

In these quotes, the interviewee first categorically describes how individual civil and political rights are *not* addressed in their dialogues, whereas non-controversial socio-economic rights do feature in their dialogues. Nevertheless, as displayed in an example related to this sector in Table 6.2 (Chapter 6), this role of socio-economic rights is not systematic. Officials consider the value to be passively promoted through employment and social affairs dialogues, with human rights, “not really explicitly” being included.³⁴⁵

In this sense, as well as highlighting how discourse 1 is legitimising a lack of systematic value mainstreaming, the examples highlight how socio-economic rights are being sporadically tabled in these dialogues, nonetheless.

More pertinently, the above example also alludes to how individual civil and political rights are bleeding into these dialogues without any systematic design or even awareness by the interviewee. Free speech, contrary to the interviewee’s claim, reflects an individual civil and political right, in any context. Additionally, the example suggests that the

³⁴² Interview with an official from DG EMPL on 03.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

³⁴³ *ibid.*

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*

³⁴⁵ *ibid.*

interviewee has an aversion towards raising these more controversial dimensions of human rights for fear of upsetting the Chinese side. This is reflected in the notion that these areas are “sensitive” and “threaten the regime” and reinforces how discourse 3 is being used to justify an avoidance of systematic value mainstreaming with China.

An EEAS diplomat reaffirmed that partial mainstreaming of high-sensitivity human rights was taking place in employment and social affairs dialogues. They noted that they attended one of the dialogues and “couldn’t believe” that their Commission colleagues were “talking about collective bargaining” and “women’s access to the labour market”,³⁴⁶ issues which were difficult to broach in the human rights dialogue. This example also implicitly highlights how the EEAS tolerates partial mainstreaming by their colleagues, failing to intervene to improve awareness and instil systematic mainstreaming practices - i.e. they “couldn’t believe” these controversial dimensions of the sector were being raised, because they were under the impression that this was not taking place.

Partial mainstreaming of sustainable development was also identified in these dialogues. A DG EMPL official described how dialogues with the Chinese side were under the conceptual auspices of a “green economy” and “green jobs”, but they did not frame these elements of their dialogues as an exercise in value mainstreaming. Encapsulating this, they recognised that it was “very much [a] value... our goal [of] climate change” while being “also very practical”.³⁴⁷

The language in these quotes portrays a situation where sustainable development is existing passively behind very technical discussions with the Chinese side, as opposed to being considered a normative dimension which is systematically mainstreamed into dialogues. An additional key example from Pillar 2 is presented in Table 9.2, while Appendix v provides examples of partial mainstreaming from the author’s first-hand experience of an EU-China employment and social affairs dialogue.

³⁴⁶ Interview with a diplomat from EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

³⁴⁷ Interview with an official from DG EMPL on 03.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

Table 9.2 Additional key example of partial mainstreaming from Pillar 2 dialogues

Commission Directorate General and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
Information and Media Society Section, EU Delegation to China [BEI]	<p>1. The interviewee stated that “these things [EU values] don’t really enter the work here” and framed their commentary on issues like data protection as a technical <i>business issue</i>, as opposed to a question of promoting EU values, noting that Chinese “laws have clauses... that target our guys”.³⁴⁸</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that mainstreaming of the Article 21/NPE values does not take place in their dialogues (they “don’t really enter the work here”). • However, alludes to data protection being frequently raised with the Chinese side. This issue has strong connections to individual civil and political rights. • Nevertheless, the interviewee suggests that it is being approached purely in the context of concern for European businesses “laws have clauses... that target our guys”. • In line with partial mainstreaming, the example suggests: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Human rights related issues are being sporadically tabled in communications technologies dialogues. b) The interviewee does not appear to be explicitly aware of these connections and is neglecting to systematically exploit them to enhance value mainstreaming with China.

³⁴⁸ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

Role of the EEAS in enabling partial mainstreaming

The analysis of EEAS diplomats' accounts appeared to confirm that they recognised and thus enabled partial mainstreaming amongst their Commission colleagues. For example, in reference to their colleagues managing the Pillar 2 communication technologies dialogues and implementing the Pillar 1 cyber security dialogue, one EEAS diplomat stated that "if they say they don't work on human rights, they are [working on it, in their dialogue] ...you don't have to sit down and discuss [it with them]" to ensure that they mainstream the value.³⁴⁹ They described one particular example where their colleagues had unilaterally "identified a problem" with China's 2015 Cyber Security Law and its apparent enabling of limitless government access to all China-based data/information.

The interviewee alludes to a recognition that their colleagues in this sector are potentially unaware that they are mainstreaming human rights with China in their dialogues, despite these issues entering into exchanges ("if they say they don't work on human rights, they are"). However, they also suggest that they are not taking any further action to raise awareness amongst their Commission colleagues about the human rights dimensions of this sector, nor promote systematic value mainstreaming. Instead, they seem to be satisfied that the value is being raised in this sporadic, non-systematic fashion ("you don't have to sit down and discuss [it with them]"). In this sense, there is a toleration of partial mainstreaming and through inaction, complicity in these practices at odds with the official discourse found in documents and the ideal-type of NPE.

Interestingly, the interviewee also appears to express an *if it's not broken, don't fix it* mentality. This is arguably rooted in an awareness that there is an aversion to value mainstreaming amongst their Commission colleagues and perhaps even some recognition of the discourses being used to justify this. In this sense, there appears to be a reluctance by EEAS diplomats to highlight the connections between sectoral substance and EU values, lest they risk EU values not being raised at all by their Commission colleagues. For example, on the basis that they consider value mainstreaming inapplicable to their dialogue (discourse 2) or expect such activities to antagonise their counterparts (discourse 3).

³⁴⁹ Interview with a diplomat from EEAS on 07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

As the above example extends to the Pillar 1 cyber security dialogue, as well as the pillar 2 dialogues associated with this sector, it reflects evidence that partial mainstreaming may extend into EU-China political dialogues, many of which are wholly operationalised by the EEAS. Supporting the above inferences, another EEAS diplomat described how:

Even at the technical level ...they're (Commission officials) doing more of that, than they actually realise themselves, simply because ...where they're coming from is our, is the European standards laws of regulations and that's embedded in it, so even if they don't realise it, there's a lot more in there than, and they [realise], but if they don't realise it, that's where we come in and give thatI know that DG's often complain that, you know what value added, does the EEAS bring?³⁵⁰

The interviewee explicitly confirms the existence of partial mainstreaming amongst their Commission colleagues, who are cast as doing more value mainstreaming “than they actually realise themselves”, due to EU values being “embedded” in European standards, laws and regulations. Unlike the previous example, while the interviewee appears to recognise partial mainstreaming and infer that such activities are natural, taking place regularly (Commission officials are “doing it”), they suggest that the EEAS can and does intervene to raise awareness (“if they don't realise it, that's where we come in”).

However, such interventions appear to be very ad-hoc and dependent on communication between the Commission DGs and the EEAS, the former which is wary of EEAS input (i.e. “I know that DG's often complain that, you know what value added, does the EEAS bring?”). The example therefore also highlights how a toleration of partial mainstreaming by the EEAS is partly informed by the challenges posed by interinstitutional tensions with the Commission, as well as concern over triggering discourses legitimising an avoidance of such activities. This interinstitutional dimension is addressed section 9.4.

Finally, the above example also reinforces conclusions from Chapter 6. The interviewee appears to allude to the EEAS sharing and enabling discourse 2, through casting more technical exchanges as less likely to feature value mainstreaming (i.e. “even at the technical level”). Further key examples of the role of the EEAS in partial mainstreaming can be seen in Table 9.3 below.

³⁵⁰ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

Table 9.3 Additional key examples displaying a toleration of partial mainstreaming by the EEAS

EEAS Directorate and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	1. “Nowadays it’s very difficult to discuss trade and investment if you are not going to discuss for example coal labour standards or corporate social responsibility, so that is also, in a way, discussing some human rights you know” ³⁵¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that Commission officials from DG TRADE are raising issues connecting to EU values, even if they are not aware of it. • Infers that the EEAS is aware of partial mainstreaming dynamics but tolerates them. • The interviewee makes no suggestion that they intend to raise awareness amongst their Commission colleagues about these value dimensions and promote more systematic activities.
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	2. The interviewee described how their DG TRADE colleagues were “more technically minded, less politically minded” and that while they were “less engaged with human rights issues”, they “indirectly” covered issues such as labour regulations and public procurement, that are interlinked. ³⁵²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infers that partial mainstreaming is taking place in trade dialogues. • Captured by the notion that labour regulations and public procurement “indirectly” link to human rights which DG Trade officials are not necessarily aware of. • Supports the notion that the EEAS is tolerating such activities with interviewee suggesting that such oversight by their Commission colleagues is normal/natural. • Also displays discourse 2 in suggesting that values are not relevant to trade dialogues (i.e. their colleagues are “more technically minded, less politically minded ...less engaged with human rights issues”).

³⁵¹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

³⁵² Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 11am, in Brussels.

<p>Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]</p>	<p>3. For sure, labour standards ...are highly important and I [have] ...not been in the trade section or the environmental section [of the EU delegation] but I am sure those are factored into the negotiations ...but I bet if you talked to the people who are doing it they would say we are not helping human rights cases, at best they would say, well this is about rule of law, but more than likely they would say, this is our professional competence, it is about labour.³⁵³</p> <p>4. Things like labour standards, environmental standards, these are things which officials in the EU Commission are, it is just part of them, they know it, they do it, they understand because that's what happens in Europe, and ...these are not diplomats, these are trade officials, they know all about the internal market.³⁵⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, displays how the EEAS recognises and tolerates partial mainstreaming in EU-China trade dialogues (“I bet if you talked to the people who are doing it they would say we are not helping human rights cases...”) • Labour standards approached as technical issues, detached from their human rights basis (“more than likely they would say, this is our professional competence, it is about labour”). • Alludes to the EEAS sharing and enabling discourses legitimising a lack of systematic value mainstreaming. • In this fashion, the interviewee displays discourse 2 in suggesting that value mainstreaming is not applicable to EU-China trade dialogues (“these are not diplomats, these are trade officials, they know all about the internal market”).
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³⁵³ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm in Bath.

³⁵⁴ *ibid.*

9.3 EEAS activities promoting value mainstreaming

Departing from partial mainstreaming, it is also important to recognise the ad-hoc efforts to promote value mainstreaming in Commission-led dialogues by EEAS diplomats from the institution's *China, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Mongolia Unit* (a.k.a. *the China Division*). As noted in Chapter 5.4.2, the Unit has primary responsibility for coordinating EU-China dialogues. These ad-hoc efforts seemingly reflect a *counter-force* to the challenges to value mainstreaming posed by both the discourses described in Chapters 6-7 and the lack of understanding of China detailed in Chapter 8. They also superficially appear to reflect the EEAS behaving in line with the expectations of the EU's official discourse found in documents i.e. coordinating *systematic value mainstreaming* in all EU-China dialogues (See Chapter 6.2.3).

However, the analysis revealed that these activities were relatively weak and low-impact in practice. Their ad-hoc and non-explicit nature appeared not to fulfil the EEAS's expected role according to the official discourse, nor the realisation of such *systematic* practices in EU-China dialogues. As a result, these EEAS ad-hoc coordination efforts mirrored partial mainstreaming in being limited in their scope to fully realise the ideal-type of NPE versus the pursuit of systematic practices. These would involve the methodical coordination of value mainstreaming through new or existing internal meeting mechanisms, like the China Country Team (CCT) (See Chapter 6.5).

Additionally, the analysis suggested that EEAS diplomats were instrumentally restraining themselves from pursuing more assertive - and by extension systematic - promotion of value mainstreaming with their Commission colleagues. This supports prior conclusions in this chapter that the EEAS is tolerating sub-par mainstreaming practices. Moreover, akin to partial mainstreaming, it appears that this restraint may be partly informed by logistical limitations and interinstitutional tensions between the EEAS and the European Commission. Both aspects appear to limit the capacity of the EEAS to affect the substance of all EU-China dialogues through ad-hoc contacts with the Commission DGs. This dimension is addressed in Section 9.4.

Mainstreaming Activities

A key example displaying the EEAS's mainstreaming efforts could be found in the account of a diplomat involved with bilateral human rights promotion. They described the active attempts by them and their colleagues to monitor the substance of EU-China dialogues and if necessary, intervene:

We go to every single DG of the European Commission, because there is so much engagement and so many dialogues and we talk to them – when is your next dialogue? What are you going to do? What's on the agenda and how are you going to... practically implement EU strategy and how you are you going to keep in mind that we have problems on this, this, this and that area and that we also have to not forget our values and also have to...?³⁵⁵

The interviewee suggests a comprehensive, yet ad-hoc process ("we go to every single DG"), where, with a pre-designed set of questions, EEAS diplomats actively approach the Commission *China desks* incorporated by their thematic portfolio (See chapter 5.4), to coordinate the substance of dialogues. In the case of human rights, the portfolio is unique in being horizontally applicable to all EU-China dialogues.

However, EU values are notably cast by the interviewee as only one aspect of these ad-hoc communications, which encompass numerous issues (i.e. including EU material interests or sector specific priorities), as opposed to a priority area which is approached in isolation to promote systematic value mainstreaming ("we also have to not forget our values"). Crucially, the suggestion that officials would "forget" EU values without prompting, also arguably alludes to the lack of systematic mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues, captured throughout previous chapters.

Regarding their specific portfolio of human rights, the interviewee provided greater insight into their activities. They stated that: "to put it very bluntly, I mean this is oversimplifying it, get everything you can discuss under sectoral issues"³⁵⁶. This comment alludes to attempts to encourage the promotion of human rights indirectly with the Chinese side, by including it in the agendas explicitly or implicitly of other EU-China dialogues. The need for these issues to be *siphoned off* from the human rights dialogue,

³⁵⁵ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

³⁵⁶ *ibid.*

by lobbying their Commission colleagues, importantly alludes to China's obstruction during these exchanges and a perception on the EU side that China is the *problem-partner* in the dialogue. This reaffirms the prevalence of discourses 3 and 5 on the EU side which blame China for a lack of systematic value mainstreaming.

Similarly, the initial quote appears to reference discourse 3 in alluding to a situation where problems with China are so numerous that Commission officials require the EEAS's assistance to keep track ("how you are you going to keep in mind that we have problems on this, this, this and that area"). The interviewee also appears to hint at the sheer number of EU-China dialogues ("there is so much engagement and so many dialogues") and the logistical challenge this poses to the EEAS in coordinating value mainstreaming (See Section 9.4).

Another EEAS diplomat connected to EU-China economic dialogues, described a similar *active* process of scrutiny and enforcement, providing an example of how they recently stepped in to amend an EU-China agreement drafted by one of the DGs, which neglected EU material interests:

A particular DG wanted to conclude ... [a] research cooperation agreement and kind of by chance, the annex listing of the priority sectors coincided with those in *Made in China 2025*... there were [no EU] interests, only the Chinese ones... [which was] something that we couldn't possibly let go ahead. So, it wasn't just the EEAS, there were other DG's that pointed this out, because they were more responsible for certain ...sectors that could potentially have been hurt, but we managed to reconduct that, agreement in a way that's more balanced. So, it's not a good example for you in the sense that ...I'm not referring to rule of law or human rights, but it would have been exactly the same sort of process.³⁵⁷

This example importantly highlights how beyond those individuals in the China Division working directly with human rights, value promotion reflects *one of many issues* coordinated by EEAS diplomats with their Commission officials. In this sense, discussion of values is not necessarily featured in these interinstitutional ad-hoc communications and the process is not systematic.

³⁵⁷ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

Impact of EEAS activities promoting value mainstreaming

The limitations of these coordination activities for value mainstreaming were displayed first and foremost in EEAS diplomats' own explicit confirmation that they were seldom successful in practice. For example, when asked about the extent to which they felt that their Commission colleagues were acting upon their suggestions, one EEAS diplomat connected to human rights promotion described how "it's touch and go, I mean [sighs]... it's not very quantifiable, yeah, it not very [sighs]... people might be hard to convince".

Their language portrays a challenging situation where their colleagues are just as likely to reject requests as act upon them ("it's touch and go"). Moreover, their clarification that "it's not very quantifiable" can be interpreted in several ways. Firstly, it captures how value mainstreaming does not necessarily featuring in all EEAS-Commission contacts explicitly (so it's difficult for the interviewee to quantify). It also arguably hints at the difficulties in measuring the outcomes with China if Commission officials are carrying out such activities (i.e. trade objectives can be quantified unlike value promotion). More profoundly, it infers a lack of certainty by the interviewee about whether they are successfully convincing their colleagues to mainstream values. This again captures the role of interinstitutional tensions in impeding the EEAS's mainstreaming activities, a notion which is reaffirmed by the repeated *sighs* in the quote which suggest challenging or even confrontational relational dynamics between the Commission and the EEAS.

Relatedly, the example also importantly hints at the existence and power of the discourses impeding value mainstreaming and their connection with the apparent low success-rate of the EEAS's suggestions ("people might be hard to convince").

Consolidating this linkage, the interviewee provided an example of the resistance they face:

Most research people ...think: *this is science and this is for the sake of science and we are just engaging in research and this is not politicised and we shouldn't, you know, start talking about [human rights]*... but then they have to understand that even if you're talking about collection of data and breach of privacy for the sake of science and research, it's still breach of privacy and your still treading on the individual rights ...sometimes, some people might be hard to convince.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

The language explicitly alludes to the impact of discourse 2 in hindering value mainstreaming in research and cooperation dialogues and by extension, the EEAS's coordination efforts. This is reflected in the notion that "most research people" perceive human rights as inapplicable to their dialogues and cooperation programmes/projects with China (i.e. "this is science ...and we shouldn't you know start talking about [human rights]"). It is also reinforced by the suggestion that these individuals lack awareness of the value dimensions of their sector and their related responsibilities to uphold them ("they have to understand that even if you're talking about collection of data and breach of privacy for the sake of science and research, it's still breach of privacy"). Similarly, the example appears to reference discourse 3 as another basis of resistance to the EEAS's coordination efforts, with the suggestion that these Commission officials are avoiding value mainstreaming so as not to create tensions with the Chinese side ("we are just engaging in research and this is not politicised").

Significantly, it is also worth highlighting that Commission interviewees typically played down or denied that EEAS attempts to promote value mainstreaming in their dialogues were taking place. This supports the notion that values are not always featuring in these ad-hoc coordination efforts by the EEAS and underlines the limited success of diplomats in convincing their Commission colleagues to carry out such activities. Beyond this, it can be argued that the low-impact of the EEAS's activities is inherently reflected in the main finding of this thesis, that systematic value mainstreaming is not taking place in EU-China dialogues.

Indirect approaches

However, Commission officials denying the existence of the EEAS's mainstreaming efforts also potentially alludes to another interesting dimension of these ad-hoc practices. A diplomat connected to human rights suggested that promoting value mainstreaming amongst their Commission colleagues was often intentionally pursued in an *indirect* fashion. The interviewee noted that:

I don't have to label it human rights [when communicating with colleagues], although when they see me, people know, it says human rights on my forehead.³⁵⁹

The language here infers that in ad-hoc contacts the interviewee seeks to indirectly promote human rights by avoiding the nomenclature and explicit reference to their portfolio as well as through re-framing (*re-labelling*) of the issues, ostensibly as technical areas. However, the quote also suggests that their physical presence is negative for promoting human rights mainstreaming with Commission colleagues. The notion that other EU officials physically seeing them as the individual working with human rights would make them inattentive to mainstreaming the value, highlights the aversion towards such activities, captured by the discourses elucidated in Chapters 6-7.

The interviewee provided an interesting example of how they framed human rights issues in this *indirect* technical manner in EU-China health dialogues. They described how they urged their applicable Commission colleagues to raise *treatment of drug users* with China. This theme links to individual civil and political rights yet reflects an area which is “so vague and subjective in application”³⁶⁰ (i.e. it's ostensibly about resolving a public health issue of mutual interest). Their language again suggests that if Commission officials were made aware that they were promoting a human rights issue with China, it would make them less likely to do so, linking to the discourses challenging value mainstreaming. The interviewee feels that they have to resort to subtler strategies that do not directly frame the issue as such (i.e. a “vague and subjective” connection to human rights).

The above example also displays a fascinating parallel between the manner in the which the EEAS is promoting value mainstreaming with their own colleagues and with the Chinese side, beyond the human rights dialogues. In both instances, there is an effort to avoid an awareness that human rights is being discussed, lest they risk the issue not being broached at all. Moreover, both aspects can be linked with the discourses justifying a lack of systematic value mainstreaming. EEAS officials are concerned about a) triggering resistance to value mainstreaming by their colleagues and b) triggering obstruction by the Chinese side, when these issues are explicitly raised in dialogues.

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*

Interestingly, this connection between internal and external strategies for value mainstreaming was explicitly made by one EEAS diplomat, who described the need to:

Work on the messages... that we could adapt to different situations and that would make it more acceptable, well first to our Commission colleagues and then also to the Chinese, so this is definitely something we have to work harder on.³⁶¹

Importantly, the notion that EU values are not “acceptable” to either their EU colleagues or the Chinese side reinforces the argued connection between the pursuit of these indirect approaches along with the existence, strength and impact of the discourses impacting value mainstreaming (“this is definitely something we have to work harder on”). Lastly, it is worth highlighting how this concern over triggering the discourses shared by their colleagues, links the weakness of the EEAS’s ad-hoc coordination efforts with its tolerance of partial mainstreaming. In the latter case, such tolerance appears to also derive from concern over their Commission colleagues not mainstreaming values at all if awareness about these value dimensions is raised. Additional examples displaying the EEAS’s ad-hoc coordination activities to promote value mainstreaming are presented in Table 9.4.

³⁶¹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

Table 9.4 Additional key examples displaying the ad-hoc efforts by the EEAS to promote value mainstreaming

EEAS Directorate and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	<p>1. “We can establish cross relation between files and negotiate trade offs and try to find compromises that way. So, it doesn’t always work but at least we try. so that’s the double service we can offer, DG’s ...But for that we need to be involved in what they do.”³⁶²</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that the ad-hoc coordination conducted by the EEAS with Commission DGs is very broad and there is no specific value component. • Infers that such coordination is not always, or perhaps even seldom successful: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The language portrays the EEAS having the capacity to coordinate dialogues as a “service” which “can” be taken advantage of, but this is not taking place (“we need to be involved in what they do”). ▪ This alludes to interinstitutional tensions, hinting that Commission DGs are reluctant or even resistant to let the EEAS participate in dialogues and their substance. ▪ Suggestion that “it doesn’t always work” infers sporadic compliance by Commission DGs with any EEAS recommendation. • Interviewee also portrays resignation about the situation (“at least we try”). This reinforces the notion that the EEAS are tolerating and thus enabling a lack of systematic value mainstreaming.

³⁶² Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

<p>ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]</p>	<p>2. “I mean part of it is to make people understand that it does not always have to be a confrontation. It does not always have to be... I don’t know, with a halo on your head and wings on your back that you’re going to you know... you have to become a missionary on human rights to be able to realise these things”.³⁶³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infers a perception amongst Commission officials that value mainstreaming can only be conflictual and will undermine exchanges (“always have ...a confrontation”), being a very explicit and naively idealistic activity (“you have to become a missionary on human rights”). • Their language suggests this perception is ingrained amongst officials. • This reflected in them describing the need to “make” their colleagues “understand” how and why they should be mainstreaming human rights. • This prevalent and internalised view amongst officials alludes to the discourses surrounding China’s role (3-5) and suggests they are impeding the EEAS’s ad-hoc value mainstreaming coordination activities.
<p>ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]</p>	<p>3. “The fact that it’s now written out there and that mainstreaming has become a popular term, doesn’t mean that we haven’t been doing it for ages, (Int: mhmm) uhm, erh,... it’s good to point it out as to raise awareness and do it a bit more systematically, (Int: mhmm) erh, but it’s always been done”.³⁶⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays how value mainstreaming has historically not been a systematic process in the EU’s external actions. • Suggests that EEAS officials tolerate and enable the lack of such practices amongst their Commission colleagues. • <i>Raising awareness</i> for more systematic activities cast as an optional activity as opposed to a priority, to meet the EU’s obligations with China and EEAS’s own expected behaviour (“it’s good to point it out”). • They appear accept the status quo, suggesting mainstreaming is sufficiently taking place (“it’s always been done”). • Interviewee casts systematic mainstreaming practices prescribed by the Lisbon Treaty (where it’s “now written out”) as idyllic standards as opposed to obligations that all EU diplomats should be adhering to.

³⁶³ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

³⁶⁴ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

9.4 Limitations to interinstitutional value mainstreaming: Logistics and resistance

Building on conclusions throughout this chapter, it is crucial to address how the limited impact of the EEAS's ad-hoc mainstreaming efforts and the institution's tolerance of partial mainstreaming may also be linked to 1) its logistical capacity and 2) interinstitutional tensions with the Commission. Both elements arguably impede EEAS diplomats' attempts to promote value mainstreaming amongst their colleagues and intensify the strength of the discourses challenging value mainstreaming. Additionally, these limitations reflect an additional explanation for the EEAS's apparent enabling or active reproduction of the discourses justifying value mainstreaming, described in Chapters 6-7.

Logistical capacity

The EEAS's ability to coordinate the substance of all EU-China dialogues beyond a formal mechanism like the CCT is inherently limited by the small size of the unit principally responsible. As described in Chapter 5.4, the China Division's seven diplomats coordinate more than 50 dialogues between them, as well as operationalising specific pillar 1 dialogues. This logistical reality may be contributing to the EEAS's apparent tolerance of partial mainstreaming. In this sense, it could be argued that the China Division simply does not have the human resources to influence the substance of dialogues more thoroughly and instil more systematic mainstreaming practices. Similarly, such limited capacity may be contributing to the apparent low-impact of the EEAS's ad-hoc value mainstreaming efforts. A perception amongst Commission officials that the EEAS is not fulfilling such a role may be derivative of diplomats not having the time/resources to address the role of values in every dialogue.

However, it can be argued that if the coordination of systematic value mainstreaming was incorporated into a formal mechanism akin to the CCT, which brings together thematic clusters of DGs or all DGs into a more manageable group, then the EEAS's logistical limitations would be countered. Similarly, if formal mechanisms were introduced to ensure that both Commission and EEAS officials systematically incorporated values into

their dialogues, then it would negate the current situation, where the EEAS has the lone role of ensuring value mainstreaming is carried out in all EU-China dialogues.

Interinstitutional tensions

Conversely, interinstitutional tensions between the EEAS and the Commission appear to be far more ingrained and reflect a greater barrier to the EEAS's capacity to influence Commission officials and in turn, maximise its power as a co-equal entity, as defined in the Lisbon Treaty (See Chapter 5.3). These interinstitutional tensions largely derive from the founding of the EEAS, whereupon, the Commission ceded responsibility for many areas of the EU's external action to a new institution – the EEAS - closely linked with the member states foreign services, upon their demand. As one EEAS interviewee summarised:

We are a very strange animal ...this is what some member states wanted but that generated a lot of mistrust on the part of some Commission Services, because it's like it could not be part of the Commission because those member states do not trust the Commission and want to reduce the power of the Commission ...it was a clear indication of how the European Commission is perceived by some of the [member] states.³⁶⁵

While initial teething problems appear to have been resolved under HR/VP Mogherini's leadership,³⁶⁶ interviewee's accounts portrayed continued resentment about the creation of this new institution and resistance to its participation in Commission affairs – still often deemed to reflect interference, as opposed to value-added cooperation. The extent of these interinstitutional tensions and their practical impact was effectively captured by the EEAS diplomat quoted above, when describing how their Commission colleagues perceived the EEAS:

³⁶⁵ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.04.2015 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

³⁶⁶ Interview with an official from DG ENV on 08.03.2017 at 11.00am and diplomats from the EEAS on 10.04.2015 at 3.30pm, 09.03.2017 at 10.00am and 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, all in Brussels.

It's not popular at all. In fact, some of them regard us as a kind of 'virus' and they're afraid that they might be contaminated [interviewer laughs]. No, it's true.³⁶⁷

Firstly, the interviewee explicitly infers that many, if not most Commission staff have a negative view of the EEAS ("It's not popular at all"). Thereafter, the interviewee provides insight into not only the gravity of this resentment but its practical impact, with language suggesting that the Commission officials avoid contact as far as possible with their EEAS colleagues. They are cast as viewing any interaction as a potential existential threat that could risk critically undermining their activities (such as the EU-China dialogues they operationalise). This is captured by the comparison of the EEAS to a "virus", which could contaminate Commission officials through exposure. Notably, the interviewee suggests that this comparison is not an exaggeration in response to the interviewer's laughter/disbelief, casting it as "true".

This was later reaffirmed when the interviewee described how the founding of the EEAS was perceived by the Commission as a "re-nationalization of foreign policy", threatening the independence and efficacy at the EU-level, and as a result:

Some parts of the Commission were also afraid that we would - so I'm not joking when I said we would contaminate them - that we would also contribute to [a] weakening of the Commission and export our bad practices to the European Commission.³⁶⁸

Here the *virus* metaphor is reinforced and expanded upon with language casting Commission officials as being concerned about being "weakened" in their activities by *exposure* to the EEAS's (constitutionally established) coordinating role and associated working methods, which are perceived negatively due to their connections to the member states (i.e. "bad practices"). Crucially, like the prior quote, the language alludes to how the interinstitutional tensions practically impact the EEAS's capacity to influence Commission activities (i.e. they want to avoid contact with the EEAS). This supports the argument that such dynamics partway inform the EEAS's toleration of partial mainstreaming and the low-success of its ad-hoc mainstreaming activities.

³⁶⁷ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.04.2015 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

³⁶⁸ *ibid.*

This relationship between interinstitutional tensions and the EEAS's capacity to influence dialogues appeared to be supported by another EEAS diplomat speaking specifically about value mainstreaming. They described how:

You can't force people to actually use the [the EEAS's recommendations]... you know we've got background, we've got speaking points and ...if we could try and be a little more creative as well ...that might be helpful.³⁶⁹

The idea that you'd need to "force" Commission officials to follow recommendations from the EEAS on raising values with China, emphasises the level of resistance faced by EEAS diplomats and alludes to the extent to which it acts as a barrier to their efforts. The example can also be seen reference the existence and power of the discourses impeding value mainstreaming, with the suggestion that "creative" approaches are necessary to convince their Commission colleagues to mainstream values with China.

The interviewee also notably elaborated that "[we need to be] a bit more creative and maybe a bit more subtle".³⁷⁰ This interestingly suggests that the indirect strategies for promoting value mainstreaming which are currently being pursued by some EEAS diplomats, reflects an example of the sort *creative approaches* promoted above. Nevertheless, the notion of adopting "creative" or more "subtle" approaches appears to refer to the EEAS seeking to *work around* the discourses impeding value mainstreaming.

Another EEAS interviewee reinforced the practical limitations faced by the EEAS in light of these relational dynamics, describing how:

In many of the areas, in fact in most of the areas, the DG responsible for the subject area has the lead and organises the dialogue and, that's it. Basically as, I see our role ...so far as possible taking part in those dialogues. If we can be involved in the agenda setting, or at least comment on it.³⁷¹

Here the interviewee emphasises the limited power of the EEAS in "most ...areas" of cooperation with China. They infer that the EEAS having any input in the planning of Commission-led dialogues is not *a given* and dependent on the permission of the DGs (i.e. "*if we can be involved in the agenda setting*" [emphasis added]). This is underscored by

³⁶⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

³⁷⁰ *ibid.*

³⁷¹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

the suggestion that the EEAS being able to “at least comment on” the agenda reflects a positive outcome. Lastly, their comment “and that’s it” suggests finality to this power balance and highlights the degree to which the diplomat feels that they cannot change this relational dynamic and more substantially influence EU-China dialogues that are Commission-led.

It is important however, to qualify these quotes, in the sense that the diplomat in question works with particularly powerful DGs involved in EU-China economic relations. Nonetheless, the language points to a situation where interinstitutional tensions greatly inhibit the capacity of the EEAS to affect dialogues, supporting the argument that this aspect is informing the EEAS’s toleration of partial mainstreaming and the weakness of its ad-hoc mainstreaming efforts.

Overall, in a similar fashion to conclusions regarding the logistical limitations faced by the EEAS, interinstitutional tensions would arguably be greatly reduced in impact if formal mechanisms were introduced. In this sense, if both EEAS and Commission officials were bound by institutional mechanisms to systematically mainstream values in EU-China dialogues, then such activities would no longer be so dependent on the initiative of the EEAS and its capacity to influence Commission officials.

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter revealed the value mainstreaming activities which *are* taking place in EU-China dialogues, irrespective of the challenges posed by the discourses and lack of understanding of China described throughout chapters 6-8. These practices importantly highlighted that the EU’s values underpin EU-China dialogues and thus the existence of the EU’s normative power with China. However, they were revealed to be limited in scope and unable to meet the systematic value mainstreaming standards promoted by the EU’s official discourse on value mainstreaming and the ideal-type of NPE. In this sense, they appeared to reaffirm, rather than compensate for the weakness of the EU’s normative power in EU-China dialogues.

The concept of *partial mainstreaming* captured the sporadic inclusion of value-related issues in dialogues, often without the awareness of officials, purely by virtue of these

aspects being *pre-designed* into each sector of EU-China relations. It emerged that the EEAS was tolerating these activities, holding back from promoting more systematic practices which could effectively realise the official discourse found in documents.

The chapter also highlighted the EEAS's own efforts to coordinate value mainstreaming in Commission-led dialogues through ad-hoc communications. Again, these activities appeared to be unable to meet the systematic standards of the official discourse and fully realise the ideal of NPE with China. In this fashion, Commission and EEAS officials suggested that such communications were rarely resulting in values being raised in dialogues, in practice.

This inefficacy appeared to be somewhat self-inflicted by EEAS diplomats, who appeared to restrain themselves from more assertive and explicit promotion of systematic value mainstreaming. In this context, it emerged that such restraint hampering ad-hoc coordination and a tolerance of partial mainstreaming could be connected to the discourses described in chapters 6-7. There appeared to be a fear of raising awareness about the value dimensions of dialogues, *triggering* the discourses and resulting in even less instances where these aspects are raised by Commission officials. This supports the conclusions in Chapters 6-7 suggesting that the EEAS is de-facto enabling the discourses challenging value mainstreaming through inaction.

However, the chapter also importantly illuminated how the weakness of these existing value mainstreaming activities was informed by logistical limitations and interinstitutional tensions. The limited human resources of the EEAS unit primarily coordinating EU-China dialogues and the tense relations with their Commission colleagues appeared to inherently reduce the capacity of the EEAS to coordinate systematic value mainstreaming. This caveat presented an additional explanation for the EEAS's apparent enabling or active reproduction of the discourses legitimising a lack of systematic value mainstreaming, described in Chapters 6-7.

Nevertheless, it appeared these elements could be significantly countered if more formal mechanisms were introduced. In this sense, limited human resources could be assuaged by the coordination of systematic value mainstreaming through new or current meeting mechanisms which regularly bring together EEAS and Commission officials. Similarly, interinstitutional tensions could be side-lined if EEAS and Commission officials had to

carry out formal actions to ensure systematic value mainstreaming in dialogues. These possible solutions are detailed in the following chapter which concludes this thesis.

Chapter 10 – Conclusions

The final chapter of this thesis summarises the research conclusions, particularly reflecting upon the findings outlined in Chapters 6-9. As described in Chapters 2 and 3, this thesis has sought to make an original contribution to existing normative power Europe (NPE) and EU-China literature through assessing the *practical* implementation of the EU's normative power with China, arguably the hardest test-case. This approach reflected a notable departure from existing scholarship, which typically adopts a macro-level appraisal of the *outcomes* of the EU's external action and assesses whether EU values or interests are being prioritised. Due to the nuanced and often overlapping relationship between values and interests, such appraisals are analytically problematic and arguably unable to discern the extent to which EU values are informing the EU's activities.

Instead, this thesis sought to illuminate the complex processes and dynamics informing the practical coordination and implementation - or mainstreaming - of the EU's values with China in EU-China dialogues, at the micro-level. These dimensions, neglected by scholars, include the role of individual EU officials mainstreaming EU values, the institutional mechanisms governing their practices and the impact of their Chinese interlocutors. To tackle this gap in existing literature, this thesis was guided by the following overarching research question:

How is the EU practically operationalising its normative power in EU-China relations?

The empirical chapters dealt with this question through highlighting the extent to which values were being incorporated into dialogues and the obstacles facing these value mainstreaming activities. They also sought to ascertain the extent to which EEAS and Commission officials were meeting their expected institutional roles in facilitating and implementing value mainstreaming with China.

The research question was operationalised through a rigorous research design, described in Chapter 4. This involved the application of discourse analysis to EU and Chinese policy documents and transcripts from 49 elite interviews with individuals involved with EU-China relations. The sample principally encompassed 41 EU officials from the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) operationalising EU-China

dialogues, based in Brussels and at the EU delegation to China, in Beijing. The remaining 8 interviews included individuals from EU member states, NGOs and the Chinese side, all of which provided important context and additional perspectives to shape and ensure the accuracy of the findings.

This research design made it possible to assess EU value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues in practice, both more broadly and specifically in the context of human rights (including rule of law) and the environmental facet of sustainable development. Through this process, this thesis uncovered shared discourses informing value mainstreaming practices by EU officials and the on-the-ground reality of the EU's normative power with China.

10.1 Main Findings – Discourses impeding value mainstreaming

The analysis found that when assessed according to the EU's official discourse on value mainstreaming found in documents, which aligns with the ideal-type standards of NPE, the practical implementation of the EU's normative power with China appeared to be weak. *Systematic value mainstreaming* was not taking place in EU-China dialogues either in a broad sense nor specifically in the cases of human rights and sustainable development.

In this fashion, officials from the Commission and the EEAS seemed to be falling short of the behaviour/practices expected of them by the official discourse. According to these standards, officials from both institutions should be systematically mainstreaming values into *all* dialogues they undertake, while the EEAS should also be actively promoting such activities through ad-hoc contacts and formal meetings, reflecting its *coordinating role* in the EU's external relations.

While this broad finding superficially supports the conclusions found in (often overlapping) NPE and EU-China literature - that the EU is prioritising its material interests with China, at the expense of value promotion³⁷² - discourse analysis captured more nuanced factors underpinning these dynamics, neglected by scholars to date. In this

³⁷² See: Balducci, 2008:27; Forsberg, 2011:119; Fox and Godement, 2009:2; Mattlin, 2012:184; Panebianco, 2009:144; Sachdeva, 2014:427

context, five key discourses were revealed to be shared amongst EU officials, that justified a lack of systematic value mainstreaming. These discourses were similarly identified across the accounts of officials based in both Brussels and Beijing. They fell into two distinct categories: the *organisational discourses* and those *surrounding China's role* (Summarised in Table 10.1 below).

Table 10.1 Summary of discourses

Discourse	Organisational discourses	Discourses surrounding China's role
1. Values are implicit to EU-China dialogues and no further action is required to realise them.	X	
2. Value mainstreaming is not relevant to all EU-China dialogues and instead the exclusive responsibility of specific individuals and dialogues (particularly the human rights dialogue).	X	
3. Raising the most EU controversial values with China is expected to trigger an obstructive response by the Chinese side which will critically undermine dialogues.		X
4. Value mainstreaming is pointless as well as risky, as Chinese interlocutors are perceived to belikely be unable to meaningfully impact Chinese policy connected to EU controversial values.		X
5. A perception amongst EU officials that <i>China is not listening to EU and it should be.</i>		X

Concerning the *organisational discourses*, Chapter 6 described how institutional dynamics and understanding of roles and responsibilities were being used as rationales for behaviour relating to value mainstreaming. In this fashion, discourse 1 highlighted how a lack of value mainstreaming was justified on the basis that EU officials perceived values to be implicit to their dialogues with China and no further action was required to realise them. Conversely, discourse 2 captured officials legitimising the avoidance of such activities on the basis that they were inapplicable to their dialogue and instead exclusively the responsibility of specific individuals and dialogues, particularly the human rights dialogue. Chapter 6 also highlighted how EEAS officials appeared to often share these organisational discourses, enabling or actively reproducing them amongst their Commission colleagues, under the auspices of their coordinating role.

These dynamics extended to the EEAS-led internal coordination/meetings mechanisms, where the organisational discourses appeared to underpin the absence of a coordination of value mainstreaming (systematic or otherwise) through these forums. The pragmatic language found in the EU's 2016 China strategy, was also highlighted to be potentially playing a role in enabling and reproducing the organisational discourses, particularly with its apparent allusion to material interest-based engagement with China and selective use of dialogues to meet EU objectives.

Building on this, Chapter 7 detailed the three remaining discourses surrounding China's perceived role as the principal impediment to EU value mainstreaming. Discourse 3 captured how concern over triggering obstructive behaviour by China, through raising the most controversial EU values in EU-China dialogues – e.g. human rights (including rule of law), but not sustainable development - was justifying an eschewing of value mainstreaming by officials. These fears appeared to be particularly prevalent in interviewees' accounts. As a result, discourse 3 seemed to reflect the dominant discourse challenging systematic value mainstreaming.

A similar *deterrence effect* appeared to derive from discourse 4, which related to how officials perceived their counterparts as unable to impact Chinese policy connecting to these controversial EU values, making value mainstreaming pointless, as well as perilous. Discourses 3 and 4 appeared to link to genuinely obstructive actions by the Chinese side.

Lastly, discourse 5, applicable to the promotion of both sustainable development and human rights, captured particularly nuanced dynamics impeding value mainstreaming.

The discourse revolved around a shared perception that *China is not listening to the EU and it should be* and seemed to be principally informed by actions on the EU side, as opposed to China's behaviour.

In the rare instances when EU values were being raised in dialogues (particularly via the human rights dialogue), the discourse appeared to underpin repeated attempts to promote EU values, while dismissing China's alternative interpretations in parallel. This conduct appeared to be informed by a lack of reflexivity on the EU side about how their approaches, which tended to assertively express a belief in the superiority and universality of the EU's values, were being interpreted by their counterparts. Repeated non-compliance by China seemingly fostered frustrations amongst EU officials, often engendering increasingly didactic approaches to value mainstreaming.

These approaches seemed to be not only unsuccessful, but counterproductive, fuelling China's obstructive behaviour, associated with discourses 3 and 4. Nonetheless, a perception that China *should be* complying led to their perpetuation, despite a recognition amongst officials about the inefficacy of these approaches. As a result, the prevalence of discourse 5 appeared to limit the pursuit of less didactic and potentially more successful strategies for value mainstreaming. These effects were reaffirmed by a pessimism amongst officials that China would ever accept EU values in the future.

Notably, like discourses 3 and 4, discourse 5 also appeared to impede value mainstreaming in all other EU-China dialogues, beyond those isolated instances where such activities were taking place. This alludes to a crucial analytical dimension highlighted in Chapter 7: first-hand experience of mainstreaming values with China did not appear to be a prerequisite for officials sharing the discourses surrounding *China's role*. In this fashion, discourse 5 seemed to inform a perception among officials lacking such experience, that value mainstreaming could only be a conflictual exercise and is thus to be avoided. This view appeared to be intensified by the pessimism associated with the discourse.

Similarly, in the case of discourses 3 and 4, it appeared that the negative experiences of those individuals who had mainstreamed values with China, particularly via the human rights dialogue, seemed to strengthen these discourses amongst officials lacking such first-hand experience. This again informed an avoidance of value mainstreaming. The apparent impact of these discourses beyond first-hand experience reinforces the

existence and power of these discourses surrounding China's role and itself reflects an interesting finding.

Supporting the conclusions from Chapter 6, Chapter 7 further suggested that EEAS diplomats shared and thus enabled or actively reproduced discourses 3-5. Relatedly, as noted above, the negative experiences of the EEAS-led human rights dialogue appeared to fuel these discourses. In this sense, the experiences of the EU's only dialogue dedicated to promoting an EU value, ironically seemed to contribute to a lack of value promotion in all other dialogues. This emphasised how China has been the chief beneficiary of the human rights dialogue framework. It has been able to compartmentalise discussion of the value to an opaque dialogue, which it has not only been able to make unproductive but engender a deterrence to the discussion of controversial EU values in all other EU-China dialogues.

In this vein, Chapters 6 and 7 suggested that all of the discourses challenging value mainstreaming seemed to align with Chinese, as opposed to EU interests, as they informed EU values not being tabled in EU-China dialogues. While China seemed to be passively benefitting from most of the discourses described above, it was potentially contributing to the perceptions associated with discourses 3 and 4. In this fashion, it appeared that China may be instrumentally exaggerating perceptions on the EU side that discussion of values would trigger obstructive responses, or that Chinese interlocutors would be unable to engage with value-related issues or impact China's policy in these areas. Relatedly, it was highlighted that discourses 3 and 4 could notably be seen to represent a de-facto compliance with China's party-state discourse on values, which was informing resistance on the Chinese side to engaging with these areas. This dynamic highlighted the importance of recognising the two-way flow of values in EU-China dialogues, as the EU was effectively *engaging with* and *acquiescing to* China's values. More significantly, it was argued that this de-facto compliance had significant implications, seemingly neglected by a complacent EU side, being potentially perceived by observers and the Chinese side as an indirect endorsement of China's official position on controversial values like human rights and more severely, a self-inflicted erosion of the EU's values and their continued relevance. As the EU's values are informed and empowered by a fear of the cruelty engendered by totalitarian governments, EU officials are actively working against the EU's normative power through capitulating to the

Chinese side. They are giving into the very fear that the EU's values are established in opposition to and designed to confront.

The analysis also suggested that the discourses described above were severely limiting the potential of the EU-China Legal Affairs Dialogue (LAD) to act as an effective strategic channel for the indirect promotion of human rights, as envisioned by its architects. Chapter 3 highlighted how the dialogue represented an interesting, yet under-researched channel, which embodied the EU's conceptual linkage between rule of law and human rights. This was reflected not only by its design, but an ongoing institutional overlap between the personnel responsible for this dialogue and the human rights dialogue.

Value mainstreaming seemed to be eschewed in the LAD based on perceptions amongst officials that the dialogue was inherently normative by-design, due to its passive connections to realising human rights (discourse 1) and a view that including human rights would be needlessly duplicating the role of the human rights dialogue (discourse 2). Similarly, it appeared that the controversial value dimensions of the LAD (namely human rights and rule of law) were being side-lined because of concern that such components would antagonise China in line with discourse 3 and relatedly, a perception that these topics could only manifest in a conflictual discussion with the Chinese side (discourse 5).

Additionally, it emerged that despite the dialogue's interlocutor being one of the few Chinese institutions that could impact Chinese human rights policy, this notwithstanding, EU officials perceived that their counterparts were unable to discuss these issues, reflecting discourse 4. Consequently, the LAD represented a key example supporting the notion that the Chinese side was instrumentally exacerbating perceptions on the EU side and the discourses they inform. The State Council interlocutors seemed to be communicating to EU officials that they could not engage with sensitive value-related issues, despite this not being the case in practice.

As a result of the perceptions encapsulated by these discourses, no systematic efforts were taking place to ensure that human rights or even rule of law related issues featured in these dialogues, enfeebling this potentially high-impact channel for value mainstreaming and thus realisation of the EU's normative power. This finding was interesting considering Commission officials' apparent view that the LAD represented an isolated channel for promoting EU values, akin to the human rights dialogue (displaying discourse 2), despite the dialogue not serving this function in practice.

Similarly, supporting the argued collusion of the EEAS in a lack of systematic value mainstreaming, it emerged that EEAS diplomats co-managing the LAD appeared to be sharing and thus enabling these discourses amongst their Commission colleagues operationalising the dialogue. This was particularly interesting, as these EEAS diplomats typically had portfolios including human rights promotion and the human rights dialogue itself, yet they nonetheless appeared to be complicit in the LAD not systematically incorporating human rights.

10.1.1 Additional findings (i) – Lack of understanding of China and value mainstreaming

Beyond the discourses legitimising an avoidance of value mainstreaming, which reflect the main findings of this thesis, the analysis also suggested a lack of understanding of China amongst EU officials was contributing to the weakness of the EU's normative power in practice. This lack of understanding appeared to be underpinned by a deficit in cultural and linguistic capacity on the EU side, with few officials displaying these interrelated skills, even at the EU delegation to China.

Analysis revealed that this deficit was rooted in drastically limited training provision by the EU vis-à-vis other international actors of comparable scale. The importance of these skills to EU-China relations, as inferred by Burnay et al. (2014) and Fulda's (2015; 2018) work described in Chapter 3, was particularly displayed in the accounts of those few officials who had developed these skills through their own initiative. These individuals displayed greater reflexivity and emphasized their value-added in fostering more positive and productive EU-China dialogues as well as the negative impact of this skill deficit on the EU side.

Chapter 8 suggested that although this lack of understanding seemed to impact all aspects of EU-China relations, it was particularly high-impact in the context of value mainstreaming due to the sensitivity of the subject matter. This could be seen in the posited links between a lack of understanding and the discourses impeding value mainstreaming.

In this respect, the analysis suggested that the concerns surrounding discourse 3 may be being intensified by this deficit on the EU side, with China's obstructive behaviour being potentially misperceived or even catalysed by cultural faux pas by EU officials. In a similar

vein, it appeared that a knowledge-gap about China's institutional structures intensified the perception amongst EU officials that Chinese interlocutors are unable to impact Chinese policy relating to EU values (discourse 4). In both cases described above, a lack of understanding seemed to reflect yet another input into the discourses, building upon EU officials' fears and aiding the Chinese efforts to exaggerate them.

Moreover, in the case of discourse 5 - *China is not listening to the EU and it should be* - encompassing EU officials' frustrations that China is not complying with EU values, the discourse may be being impacted by a lack of knowledge about China's alternative understandings of EU values and their basis. In effect, EU officials may be unable to pitch these issues in a reflexive fashion which resonates with China's system of governance and its cultural/historical basis.

Moreover, the connection to discourses 3-5 suggested that a lack of knowledge about Chinese culture and language on the EU side was informing officials engaging with China on a Eurocentric basis, which was negative to EU-China dialogues, particularly with regard to the finding of common ground on controversial EU values. However, this was qualified by an emphasis on the *mutual* nature of the lack of understanding in EU-China relations, with comparably problematic Sinocentrism on the Chinese side. It was argued that this ethnocentrism reflects the *default position* for each side in the absence of sufficient intercultural knowledge and understanding.

Although explicit examples of connections between this lack of understanding and the *organisational discourses* were not identified in interviewees' accounts, a linkage was nevertheless suggested. In this respect, low confidence about raising values with the Chinese side due to limited cultural-linguistic knowledge, was posited as a contributor to officials viewing EU values as implicit (discourse 1) or inapplicable (discourse 2) to their dialogues.

However, while the chapter identified an apparent link between a lack of understanding of China amongst EU officials, weak value mainstreaming and the discourses informing this, it also highlighted several caveats which would limit the impact of any EU steps to resolve this. Firstly, the *mutual* nature of the lack of understanding means that remedial action is also necessitated by the Chinese side. China appears to have comparable cultural-linguistic knowledge deficiencies, while its opaque institutional system and working practices limit the potential gains from an upskilled-EU. Secondly, the chapter

highlighted how mutual understanding was also dependent on the personalities and relationships between officials on each side. Reflecting these dimensions, it is important to acknowledge that EU improvements in cultural and linguistic capacity, while positive, would not represent a panacea to resolving bilateral misunderstanding and its impact on EU-China relations.

10.1.2 Additional findings (ii) - Existing mainstreaming practices and their implications

The final chapter of this thesis importantly identified and assessed the value mainstreaming activities which *are* taking place, in the absence of the systematic practices stipulated by the EU's official discourse found in documents and the ideal-type of NPE. This significantly highlighted that EU-China dialogues are underpinned by EU values and thus the existence of the EU's normative power with China in practice. This reflects a key nuance of the topic which is neglected by scholars.

However, these existing mainstreaming practices were shown to be significantly limited in their scope to realise the ideal-type of the EU's normative power with China versus systematic actions. This supported this thesis's main finding that the practical implementation of the EU's normative power remains weak in EU-China dialogues.

Firstly, the concept of *partial mainstreaming* captured how issues connected to EU values were being tabled sporadically in EU-China dialogues, often without officials necessarily being aware, due to them being *pre-built* into all sectors of EU-China cooperation (reflected in the guiding documents for each sector). This irregular and passive role of EU values in dialogues emphasised how partial mainstreaming was limited in its capacity, in comparison to the systematic practices stipulated by the EU's official discourse on value mainstreaming. Realisation of these practices would necessitate officials methodically identifying the value dimensions of their dialogues and incorporating them into all exchanges. Supporting past conclusions that the EEAS enabled a lack of systematic mainstreaming, the analysis also suggested that EEAS diplomats were not intervening to promote more systematic practices in the Commission-led dialogues.

Beyond this, the chapter also illuminated the existing efforts by the EEAS to promote value mainstreaming via ad-hoc interinstitutional contacts with their Commission colleagues. While this superficially seemed to reflect evidence of the EEAS meeting its

expected behaviour in line with the official discourse - coordinating systematic value mainstreaming - deeper analysis revealed that these activities did not fulfil these standards. In this vein, values were not necessarily discussed in these contacts (i.e. it was not systematic) and even then, not necessarily broached explicitly.

Most importantly, these activities did not appear to engender value mainstreaming, systematic or otherwise, in EU-China dialogues, having very low impact in practice. This was broadly reflected in this thesis's main finding that the practical implementation of the EU's normative power was weak with China. However, it was also displayed by Commission officials appearing to deny that their EEAS colleagues were conducting such coordination of EU values. In this sense, like partial mainstreaming, the EEAS's ad-hoc mainstreaming efforts seemed unable to compensate for a lack of systematic practices by all EU officials. Moreover, the analysis again suggested that the low-impact of the EEAS's activities was partly informed by a *self-restraint* to promote EU values more assertively and explicitly with Commission officials.

Building on this, the chapter highlighted how although these existing mainstreaming practices were taking place *despite* the discourses challenging value mainstreaming, their weakness seemed to *derive from them*. In this regard, the EEAS's i) restraint from more assertive or explicit promotion of EU values and ii) toleration of partial mainstreaming, appeared to be part-informed by a fear of *triggering* the discourses held by officials. If they were more explicit about the value dimensions of dialogues, there was a risk that their Commission colleagues would be less likely to conduct mainstreaming e.g. out of fear of antagonising their counterparts (discourse 3) or a perception that such activities were inapplicable to their sector (discourse 2). This analysis provides an additional explanation for why EEAS diplomats appeared to enable the discourses legitimising a lack of value mainstreaming in Chapter 6-7, beyond them merely sharing these discourses themselves.

The chapter also provided additional insight into the root causes of the EEAS's apparent restraint in more assertively promoting systematic value mainstreaming, highlighting the role of logistical limitations and interinstitutional tensions. It was argued that the small size of the EEAS unit responsible for coordinating EU-China dialogues inherently limited its capacity to effectively coordinate value mainstreaming. More significantly, interviewees' accounts suggested that interinstitutional relations between the

Commission and the EEAS were tense, reducing the capacity of the EEAS to influence EU-China dialogues in line with its constitutional role as a co-equal institution with the Commission. However, it was concluded that these limitations faced by the EEAS would be countered through the introduction of more formal mechanisms to deliver systematic value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues (discussed below).

10.2 Improving value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues: Finding common ground

To enhance the practical implementation of the EU's normative power, several key steps need to be taken by the EU to ensure that the systematic value mainstreaming prescribed by the EU's official discourse found in documents and aligning with the ideal-type of NPE, is practically realised. These steps would counter the discourses challenging value mainstreaming and shape the behaviour/practices of officials from the Commission and the EEAS in line with the requisite standards. They would also foster *common ground* both between EU officials, in terms of value mainstreaming standards/responsibilities, and between the EU and Chinese sides in terms of increasing mutual understanding on values.

First and foremost, formal mechanisms need to be introduced to ensure that EU officials systematically identify the value dimensions of their dialogues and how they can be directly or indirectly incorporated into EU-China dialogues. In this sense, *common ground* needs to be established between EU officials about who has responsibility for value mainstreaming with China and how it can be operationalised.

As both sides agree on the themes of dialogues in advance (See Chapter 5.6), the EU has an opportunity - which appears to be being often wasted in practice - to ensure that EU values reach the agenda. A formal mechanism to aid this, could take the form of a compulsory (physical) checklist, where officials justify the inclusion, exclusion, or simply lack of applicability of individual EU values as defined in the Lisbon Treaty, to their upcoming dialogue. This checklist could be then co-reviewed and approved by both the EEAS China Division and Senior officials from DGs in advance of dialogues, to avoid interinstitutional tensions undermining the process. If EEAS and Commission officials are jointly required to systematically mainstream EU values through a new, mutually

applicable bureaucratic layer, the EEAS would no longer have sole initiative for ensuring value mainstreaming. This would again counter the present role of institutional tensions in impeding value mainstreaming.

Supporting this mechanism, an additional complimentary step could involve the EEAS ensuring that the discussion of value mainstreaming features regularly in existing internal meeting mechanisms, reminding officials of their obligations and proposing more effective strategies for value mainstreaming. Concerning the latter, this could include raising awareness that value mainstreaming does not have to be direct/explicit in dialogues. In this vein, *indirect mainstreaming* strategies should be promoted where issues of mutual interest with China, that also address EU values, are sought by officials. For example, women's rights as a human rights issue or environmental governance as a rule of law issue. These coordination activities should incorporate meaningful discussion and raise awareness about the implications of avoiding value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues. These include a realisation that this neglect is aligning with Chinese as opposed to EU interests and could be perceived by observers and the Chinese side as i) a de-facto compliance with and endorsement of China's official interpretation of fundamental values like human rights, which is antinomic to that promoted by the EU and ii) represents an act of self-harm which actively erodes the EU's values and their continued relevance.

In the case of Brussels, where meeting mechanisms are less frequent and less manageable due to higher attendance, coordination of systematic value mainstreaming would be more effective if new and more regular mechanisms were devised. These could feature smaller groups of China desks from thematically similar DGs e.g. a meeting could bring together officials from DGs Climate Action, Energy and Environment. The above steps would particularly counter the organisational discourses, changing perceptions amongst officials that value mainstreaming is implicit to their dialogue or restricted to certain sectors/individuals.

Beyond this, the practical implementation of the EU's normative power would also be aided by improving Chinese cultural and linguistic training amongst EU officials. This knowledge would enhance officials' reflexivity in engaging with China, countering a natural Eurocentrism and potentially aiding the establishment of *common ground* between the EU and China on values. In this sense, it could potentially illuminate new areas where understanding can be reached. It could also equip officials with the

confidence to pursue more informed and creative strategies to tackle ongoing areas of contention, in a manner which China is likely to be most receptive. Moreover, it could avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and tensions, which appear to undermine not only EU value mainstreaming with China, but EU-China relations more broadly.

The EU and its member states should seriously consider greater investment in this area, particularly for officials in Beijing. Even a very limited training programme would have a positive impact on the practical implementation of the EU's normative power. For example, as one interviewee suggested, a two-week intensive course on China's institutional system, cultural features and history, for all Commission and EEAS officials engaging with China.³⁷³

10.3 Research limitations and future research

EU-China relations as a single case study

It is important to recognise some of the limitations of this thesis and possible directions for future research. Firstly, this thesis focused exclusively on EU-China relations. This was justified on the basis that the bilateral relationship displayed the greatest contrast between EU economic interests and mutual understanding on values in the EU's external relations. As a result, it reflected a single crucial case for assessing the EU's normative power in practice.

While a single case study is inherently limited in its inferential power in comparison to multi-case analysis, the selection of China on this basis maximised the generalisability of this thesis's findings. In this fashion, it would be expected that the EU's values would be least likely to be prioritised in EU-China relations. However, this thesis revealed that while the EU's normative power remains weak with China, it is informed by highly nuanced factors neglected by existing literature at the micro-level. Similarly, partial mainstreaming captured how EU values *are* underpinning EU-China dialogues in practice. This confirmed that the EU's normative power does exist in EU-China relations, though in a fashion which falls short of the ideal-type of NPE.

³⁷³ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

Reflecting these findings, it would be expected in the EU relationships with other third countries, that its normative power would also not be meeting the ideal-type of NPE, though to varying degrees. This thesis found that EU officials appeared to be severely deterred from value mainstreaming in EU-China relations due to the strength of economic interests and risk of compromising dialogues with high-stake objectives. In partnerships with weaker third countries, this barrier to realising the EU's normative power would be greatly reduced if not absent.

However, this thesis also highlighted how inter-institutional mechanisms, practices, perceived responsibilities and the division of labour between the EEAS and the Commission, also strongly underpinned a lack of systematic value mainstreaming. Consequently, even in bilateral relationships where the EU's economic interests are lower, the findings suggest that *systematic value mainstreaming in all* dialogues, as per the official discourse, is unlikely to be taking place. Nevertheless, in all cases, the findings suggest that despite a lack of systematic actions to promote EU values, they would still underpin dialogues and sporadically feature in them, in line with the concept of partial mainstreaming. The generalisability of these findings could be improved by replicating this project in other cases, particularly strategic partnerships such as EU-Russia, EU-US and EU-Brazil relations.

A focus on EU-level dialogues

Secondly, this thesis focused exclusively on the EU-level dialogues with China and the role of the EU side therein, specifically that of the Commission and the EEAS officials operationalising these exchanges. Due to the scale of EU-China relations, identifying and focusing on the area of greatest pertinence to the implementation of the EU's normative power with China, reflected a practical necessity.

A focus on the dialogues making up the EU-China Strategic Partnership was principally justified on the following basis. Firstly, this thesis's conceptual foundation of NPE considers the EU a supranational international actor distinct from its member states and these exchanges reflect the central arena of the EU-level bilateral relationship with China. Secondly, a concentration on EU-China dialogues was based on the assumption that the activities carried out by EU officials are *pre-agreed* by other key EU actors involved in EU-

China relations, namely the member states and the European Parliament. These actors provide EU-China dialogues and the institutions implementing them with their mandates.

This project was thus strategically narrowed down to sidestep the internal bargaining of the EU's foreign policy and to specifically address the micro-level dynamics of these bilateral exchanges between individual EU and Chinese officials. The emphasis on EU-level dialogues was also informed by additional practical considerations, with the officials involved with EU-level dialogues – based in both Brussels and Beijing – being readily accessible to researchers.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this thesis's exclusive focus on EU-China dialogues. There are potentially insightful dimensions of the topic not directly encompassed by the project. Firstly, EU member states each have bilateral relationships with China that impact the EU-level and which could be focused upon in a future research project. This was hinted at in Chapter 7.2.1, where it emerged that EU-level unity on human rights amongst the member states appeared to be fragile in the face of bilateral economic relationships with China.

Relatedly, future research could address the role of the Council of the European Union or the European Parliament in designing EU values into EU-China dialogues and promoting mainstreaming practices. It could emerge for example, that the common positions by these institutions informing dialogues emphasise EU material interests, acting as a further factor influencing a lack of systematic value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues.

However, it is important to emphasise that both research avenues described above, while worthwhile and capable of improving the inferential power of the findings, were beyond the scope of this thesis, in terms of time and resources.

Beyond this, it is important to acknowledge that this thesis's focus on EU-China dialogues also comes at the expense of greater exploration into the role of EU values in EU-China cooperation programmes and projects, which reflect an outcome of many dialogues. It is possible that officials carrying out these activities, such as those surrounding environmental governance and water management are more systematically incorporating values into their activities than their colleagues operationalising the dialogues (CEWP, 2018; EU Commission, 2018x). This is a particularly interesting dimension, as project staff tend to have non-official backgrounds, for example having previously worked for NGOs,

and thus may have different outlooks/approaches as a result.³⁷⁴ That being said, such backgrounds and technical expertise may make them less likely to promote EU values in practice.

Again, however, despite the implications for strengthening this thesis's findings, it was not feasible to incorporate this dimension into the project. As EU-China cooperation programmes and projects take place across China's diverse provinces, even focusing on a limited number of them in specific policy sectors, would require much more extensive time in the country.

Another significant aspect worth highlighting, is that this thesis's in-depth focus on how the EU practically promotes values in EU-China dialogues comes at the expense of greater insights into the role of the Chinese side. This thesis has sought to counter this inherent limitation through conducting interviews with Chinese officials, incorporating Chinese policy documents/speeches and taking great efforts throughout this thesis to be reflexive about China's role and the EU's conduct.

While greater emphasis on the Chinese side and its interaction with the EU's values in dialogues would be fascinating and would have enhanced this thesis's findings, its realisation was impeded by some key barriers. Many of these informed this project's research approach. Firstly, China's opaque institutional systems mean that officials are incredibly difficult to access without the aid of personal networks and even then, there would be limits not faced by researchers engaging with the EU. For this very reason, the author was only able to conduct three interviews with officials from the Chinese side, all of which were secured through personal connections established on the ground.

Relatedly, China's opaque authoritarian governance means that interviews are substantially different from those with EU officials. Chinese officials are not used to being transparent and open about government policies and strategies, particularly with a *foreigner*, while critical thinking in a one-party system is anathema. Similarly, fluency in Mandarin language, which the author lacks, would be required to conduct any quantity of meaningful interviews with Chinese officials. These aspects again informed this project

³⁷⁴ Phone Interview with an official from the European Commission based in Beijing on 23.06.2015 at 4.00pm (CST), from Bath.

focusing principally on the EU side and de-emphasising the data focus on the Chinese side.

Moreover, it is important to be lucid about the research environment in China and the associated risks for Western researchers, particularly for the sort of topic tackled in this thesis which encompasses issues considered highly sensitive in China. These risks have been increasing in recent years with China's pursuit of a more authoritarian and nationalistic governance which has informed greater suspicion of Westerners. Any misunderstandings could have serious consequences for a researcher. This aspect reflected a practical concern for this thesis's data collection, but it would be much more pressing if the project was focusing exclusively on China and more prolonged fieldwork was pursued in the country.

10.4 Implications of findings

Finally, it is important to contextualise this thesis's broad finding that the EU's normative power remains weak in EU-China dialogues. The gap between the EU and China on the most controversial values in the relationship appears to be expanding. This is most explicitly reflected in China's currently trialled - and soon to be rolled out nationwide - social credit system, institutionalisation of re-education camps in Xinjiang and intensifying crackdown on dissent (ABC, 2018; *The Guardian*, 2018). As one EEAS diplomat noted, "what we're seeing is 21st century communism on steroids".³⁷⁵ This intensifying value-gap has significant implications for the perpetuation of the universal values underpinning the EU's normative power and the Western world order.

The scale of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which would see China becoming the key bilateral partner for 60+ countries, risks a re-writing of global norms. This includes a possible mainstreaming of authoritarian governance and more broadly, the Chinese interpretation of the UN's universal values. China's transition from denial to acknowledgement and defence of the Xinjiang camps, highlights a growing international confidence in its stance on values like human rights (*The Guardian*, 2018). This global push by China comes at a time when the West is divided, with the US's Trump

³⁷⁵ EEAS diplomat speaking at an internal EU event about the EU-China human rights dialogue on 12.10.2017.

Administration having largely adopted an isolationist stance which emphasises US self-interest and restraint in asserting Western values abroad (Amnesty, 2018; *The Atlantic*, 2017). The Administration's withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and refusal to engage with or grant access to UN human rights monitors in relation to potential violations within the US, is particularly symbolic of this dramatic change in tact by the key architect and historical custodian of the UN human rights regime (*The Guardian*, 2019).

As a result, the stakes could not be higher for the EU to stand up for its values and aspire to the normative power identity promoted by the Lisbon Treaty and conceptualised by NPE. However, this thesis's findings do not bode well for the EU filling this void at this potentially critical juncture. The EU's values are not being systematically promoted with China at the EU-level not only due to a failure in institutional mechanisms, but predominantly due to a fear of upsetting the Chinese side and triggering political or economic consequences. As highlighted throughout this thesis, an aversion to asserting EU values with China on this basis, not only reflects a breach of the EU's own constitutional obligations but could be perceived as a de-facto legitimisation of the official Chinese interpretation of them. More dramatically, it represents a self-inflicted erosion of the EU's values and their pertinence, wilfully conducted by complacent EU officials.

While the introduction of new institutional mechanisms could improve value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues, the pervasive fear of antagonising China is deep-rooted and will likely continue to impede discussion of controversial values without more holistic change in EU-China relations. Much of this change needs to stem from the power-centre of the EU side: the member states. Unity on values with China amongst the EU 27, which informs the substance of EU policy and the mandate of dialogues is arguably unprecedented in its present weakness.

As highlighted in this thesis, EU officials suggest a constant battle to attain common positions on human rights, particularly with member states reliant on Chinese investments. Greece unilaterally blocking the EU's UNHRC statement criticising China's human rights record in 2017 and more recently, Italy's unilateral endorsement of the Belt and Road Initiative (the first G7 country and largest EU member state to do so) and its abstention in a European Council vote creating an EU-level mechanism strengthening the screening of Chinese investments, may be indicative of further and more serious division

in the future amongst the EU 27 (Brookings, 2019; Reuters, 2017; *The Economist*, 2019). However, the Juncker Commission's proposal for specific EU-level foreign policy issues to be decided on the basis of majority voting, including human rights, may reflect a source of hope, which could catalyse a strengthening of the EU's normative power with China (EU Commission 2018xi). Similarly, the US-China trade war offers an opportunity for the EU to reassert itself as an equal partner along with its values (Bruegel, 2018; EU Council, 2018).

Nevertheless, as things stand, the weakness of the EU's normative power and the divisions which underpin it, risk the EU sleepwalking into a new world order where China's normative power supplants its own. As one scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) noted, in the context of denying Chinese attempts to divide the EU:

We don't have the capacity to divide the EU. The EU is divided already.³⁷⁶

While the interviewee describes the division between EU member states, this thesis has displayed that this division extends to value mainstreaming in EU-China dialogues. There is division over who has responsibility for promoting values with China. There is division over how this should be pursued and the standards which should be followed. Most profoundly, there is division over its importance in EU-China relations.

³⁷⁶ Interview with a scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (State Council) on 02.06.2017 11.00am, in Beijing.

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Appendix i – Interview list: Dates/locations

1) Bath, March 2018

EU institution	Directorate (General)/ Department	Date/Location
1. European External Action Service (EEAS)	Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm, in Bath.

2) Brussels (block 1) Jan 30th - March 15th, 2017

EU institution/EU member state	Directorate (General)/ Department	Date/Location
2. European Commission	DG Climate Action (CLIMA)	16.02.2017 at 9.30am, in Brussels.
3. European Commission	DG Environment (ENV)	08.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.
4. European Commission	DG Energy (ENER)	15.02.2017 at 10.00pm, in Brussels.
5. European Commission	DG Justice and Consumers (JUST)	09.02.2017 at 10.30am, in Brussels
6. European Commission	DG Justice and Consumers (JUST)	01.03.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.
7. European Commission	DG Trade (TRADE)	15.02.2017 at 4.00pm, in Brussels.
8. European Commission	DG Trade (TRADE)	10.03.2017 at 3.00pm, in Brussels
9. European Commission	DG Economic and Financial Affairs (ECFIN)	02.03.2017 at 3.00pm, in Brussels.
10. European Commission	DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (GROW)	09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

11. European Commission	DG Research and Innovation (RTD)	08.03.2017 at 5.30pm, in Brussels.
12. European Commission	DG Education and Culture (EAC)	10.02.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.
13. European Commission	DG Education and Culture (EAC)	24.02.2017 at 3.00pm, in Brussels.
14. European External Action Service (EEAS)	ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate	23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.
15. European External Action Service (EEAS)	ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate	20.02.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.
16. European External Action Service (EEAS)	Office of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights	31.01.2017 at 11.00am, from Brussels.
17. European External Action Service (EEAS)	GLOBAL Directorate	09.03.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.
18. Council of the European Union	DG Foreign Affairs	03.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.
19. Republic of Ireland	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	13.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

3) Beijing, May 7th - June 18th, 2017

EU Institution/EU member state/Chinese Institution [PRC]/NGO	Directorate (General)/ Department	Date/Location
20. Client Earth	N/A	17.05.2017 at 9.00am, in Beijing.
21. World Resources Institute	N/A	25.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.
22. European Commission	Trade Section, EU Delegation to China	09.06.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.
23. European Commission	DG TRADE	09.06.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.

24. European Chamber of Commerce in China	N/A	07.06.2017 at 8.00am, in Beijing.
25. European Commission	Economic and Finance Section, EU Delegation to China	18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.
26. European Commission	Science and Technology Section, EU Delegation to China	23.05.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.
27. European Commission	Information Society Media Section, EU Delegation to China, [BEI]	18.05.2017 at 4.00pm, in Beijing.
28. European Commission	Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	22.05.2017 at 12.30pm, in Beijing.
29. European Commission	Local Staffer, EU Delegation to China [BEI]	26.05.2017 at 10.00am, in Beijing.
30. European External Action Service (EEAS)	Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	31.05.2017 at 12.00pm, in Beijing.
31. European External Action Service (EEAS)	Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	31.05.2017 11.00am, in Beijing.
32. European External Action Service (EEAS)	Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	08.06.2017 4.00pm, in Beijing.
33. State Council [PRC]	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	02.06.2017 10.00am, in Beijing.
34. State Council [PRC]	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	02.06.2017 11.00am, in Beijing.

35. Ministry of Environmental Protection [PRC]	N/A	17.05.2017 at 3.30pm, in Beijing.
36. United Kingdom	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Embassy Beijing	14.06.2017 at 10.00am, in Beijing.

4) Brussels (block 2) September 30th - October 16th, 2017

EU institution	Directorate (General)/ Department	Date/Location
37. European Commission	DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL)	03.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.
38. European Commission	DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL)	06.10.2017 at 4.00pm, in Brussels.
39. European Commission	DG Development Cooperation (DEVCO)	11.10.2017 at 2.30pm, in Brussels.
40. European Commission	DG Justice and Consumers (JUST)	11.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.
41. European External Action Service (EEAS)	ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate	05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.
42. European External Action Service (EEAS)	ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate	07.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.
43. European External Action Service (EEAS)	GLOBAL Directorate	10.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

5) Project Pilot Study, Brussels (April/June), 2015

EU institution	Directorate (General)/ Department	Date/Location
44. European External Action Service (EEAS)	ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate	09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.
45. European External Action Service (EEAS)	ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate	09.04.2015 at 11.00am, in Brussels.
46. European External Action Service (EEAS)	ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate	10.04.2015 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.
47. European External Action Service (EEAS)	DG Education and Culture (EAC)	10.04.2015 at 9.30am, in Brussels.
48. European External Action Service (EEAS)	DG Education and Culture (EAC)	17.06.2015 at 5.00pm, in Brussels.
49. European External Action Service (EEAS)	DG Environment (ENV)	Phone interview, 23.06.2015 at 4.00pm (CST), from Bath.

Appendix ii - EU-China dialogues

This information is adapted from the European Strategic Partnerships Observatory project by the think tank FRIDE, which is no longer active (*See*: ESPO, 2013). The project mapped out EU-China dialogues in 2013, including details of their level, information unavailable elsewhere. Before the website was removed, the author copied the data in preparation of for fieldwork in Beijing, which is displayed below. While some of the information is out of date (e.g. dialogues have been added and some DGs have changed in nomenclature), it still provides an incredibly valuable resource when triangulated with press releases connected to the dialogues and this project's interview data.

OVERVIEW

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1. Summit and Ministerial Dialogues

Type	Name (Frequency)	Interlocutors	More info
Summit	EU-China Summit (Annual)	EU: Presidents of the European Council and European Commission China: Prime Minister	The first Summit took place in 1998. Link to past Summits' joint statements.
2 Ministerial dialogues	Executive-to-Executive Meeting (Annual)	EU: President of the European Commission; other European Commissioners China: Prime Minister; other members of the State Council	
	High Level Strategic Dialogue (Annual)	EU: High Representative China: Chinese State Councillor responsible for foreign affairs	
	High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue (HED) (Annual)	EU: European Commissioners for Competition Policy; European Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs; European Commissioner for Trade; other members from the European Commission China: Vice-Premier in charge of Economic, Energy and Financial Affairs; other Ministers and Vice-Ministers	The HED is an on-going process to drive the bilateral economic relationship forward, and it provides a forum for resolving
	Economic and Trade Joint Committee (Ministerial) (Annual)	EU: European Commissioner for Trade China: Minister of Commerce	Established in 1985. It covers various issues related to trade and economy, at the bilateral and global level.

	Environment Policy Dialogue (EPD) (n/a)	EU: European Commissioner for Environment China: Minister of Environmental Protection	Established in 1992, but upgraded to ministerial level in 2003 (4th ministerial meeting in 2012).
	High Level Dialogue on an Integrated Approach to Ocean Affairs (n/a)	EU: European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs China: State Oceanic Administration (Minister)	The ministerial meetings are supported by meetings at DG/Director's level.
	High Level Innovation Cooperation Dialogue (Annual)	EU: European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science China: Minister of Science and Technology	Established in 2012.
	High Level People-to-People Dialogue (Annual)	EU: Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth China: State Councillor; Minister of Education	Established in 2012.

2. Sectoral dialogues and other platforms

Type	Name (Frequency)	Interlocutors	More info
Sectoral dialogue	Political Directors Dialogue (Annual)	EU: EEAS China: Ministry of Foreign Affairs	The EEAS is represented at the level of Deputy Secretary General.
	Political Dialogue I (Twice a year)	EU: European Ambassadors posted in Beijing China: Foreign Minister	
	Political Dialogue II (Twice a year)	EU: High Representative China: Ambassador to the EU	
	Dialogue on Security and Defence Policy (Ad hoc)	EU: EEAS China: Ministry of Foreign Affairs	This dialogue has replaced the former consultations on crisis management.
	Political Dialogue on Asia (Ad hoc)	EU: EEAS China: Ministry of Foreign Affairs	The dialogue was on hold, but it is to be reactivated in 2013
	Political Dialogue on Africa (Annual)	EU: EEAS China: Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
	Consultations on Latin America and Caribbean (n/a)	EU: EEAS China: Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
	Dialogue on Development (n/a)	EU: n/a China: n/a	
	Political Dialogue on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (Twice a year)	EU: EEAS China: Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
	EU-China Task Force on Cyber Issues (n/a)	EU: EEAS China: Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Established in 2012.

	Meetings of EUSRs and Special Envoys (Ad hoc)	EU: EEAS China: Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Meeting between (some) EU Special Representatives and Chinese Special Envoys.
	Human Rights Dialogue (Twice a year (in principle))	EU: EEAS China: Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Established in 1995. Since 2010, both sides met only once a year, despite the EU's desire to maintain a biannual dialogue
	High Level Dialogue on Migration and Mobility (Ad hoc)	EU: DG HOME (European Commission) China: Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Public Security	The dialogue was on hold, but it is to be reactivated in 2013.
	Economic and Trade Joint Committee (Senior Officials Meeting) (Annual)	EU: DG TRADE (European Commission) China: Ministry of Commerce	Senior officials meet to prepare ahead of ministerial meetings.
	Trade and Investment Policy Dialogue (TIPD) (Annual)	EU: DG TRADE (European Commission) China: Ministry of Commerce	The dialogue meets at DG's level.
	Economic and Trade Working Group (ETWG) (Annual)	EU: DG TRADE (European Commission) China: Ministry of Commerce	The dialogue meets at director's level.
	Dialogue on Intellectual Property (Annual)	EU: DG TRADE (European Commission) China: Ministry of Commerce	Established in 2003. It reports to the Economic and Trade Working Group (ETWG). It includes an IP Working Group.
	Trade Defence Instruments Group (n/a)	EU: DG TRADE (European Commission) China: Ministry of Commerce	

	Market Economy Status Working Group (n/a)	EU: DG TRADE (European Commission) China: Ministry of Commerce	
	High-Tech Trade Working Group (n/a)	EU: DG TRADE (European Commission) China: Ministry of Commerce	
	Sustainable Development Task Force (On hold)	EU: DG TRADE China: Ministry of Commerce	There has been no meeting since 2009.
	Economic and Financial Dialogue (Annual)	EU: DG ECFIN (European Commission); DG MARKT (European Commission); European Central Bank China: Ministry of Finance; People's Bank of China; China Banking Regulatory Commission; China Securities Regulatory Commission; China Insurance Regulatory Commission	Established in 2005.
	Macroeconomic Dialogue (n/a)	EU: DG ECFIN (European Commission) China: National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)	Established in 2006.
	Competition Policy Dialogue (Annual (at least))	EU: DG COMP (European Commission) China : Ministry of Commerce	The primary objective is to establish a permanent forum for consultation and transparency between China and the EU.

	Regional Policy Dialogue (Annual)	EU: DG REGIO (European Commission) China: National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)	Established in 2006. Meetings take place at Director General's level.
	Dialogue on Employment and Social Affairs (Annual)	EU: DG EMPL (European Commission) China: Ministry of Labour and Social Security	Established in 2005.
	Industrial Policy Dialogue (Annual)	EU: DG ENTR (European Commission) China: National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC); Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT)	Established in 2003 with NDRC and in 2009 with MIIT. It intends to contribute to the improvement of competitiveness
	Regulatory Dialogue (Annual)	EU: DG ENTR (European Commission) China: Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ)	The consultation mechanism, which includes dispute resolution provisions, aims to improve mutual understanding of both parties' product safety rules.
	Dialogue on Food Safety/SPS (Annual)	EU: DG SANCO (European Commission) China: Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ)	Established in 2006. It covers issues of sanitary and phytosanitary standards (SPS).

	Dialogue on Consumer Protection (Annual)	EU: DG SANCO (European Commission) China: Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ)	Established in 2006. One tangible measure under the MoU is that RAPEX (the Rapid Alert System for non-food consumer products).
	High-Level Regulatory Trilateral EU-US-China Meetings (Every 2 years)	US: Consumer Product Safety Commission EU: DG SANCO (European Commission) China: Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ)	
	Joint Customs Cooperation Committee (JCCC) (Annual)	EU: DG TAXUD (European Commission) China: Ministry of Customs	Established in 2004. The annual meeting is opened by the European Commissioner and the Chinese Minister. European and Chinese customs
	Maritime Transport Dialogue (Annual)	EU: DG MOVE China: Bureau of Water Transport; Ministry of Transport (MOT)	Established in 2002.
	Dialogue in view of possible future civil aviation agreement (n/a)	EU: DG MOVE (European Commission) China: General Administration of Civil Aviation (CAAC)	
	Dialogue on Energy (n/a)	EU: DG ENER (European Commission) China: National Energy Administration	Established in 2006. Six priority areas have been identified for cooperation between the EU and China.

	Biannual Energy Conference (Every 2 years)	EU: DG ENER (European Commission) China: Ministry of Science and Technology	Established in 1994.
	Urbanisation Forum (Annual)	EU: DG ENER (European Commission) China : National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)	Established in 2012. This dialogue coordinates various projects and meetings, including the EU-China Mayors' Forum.
	Dialogue on Energy Performance in the Construction Sector (n/a)	EU: DG ENER (European Commission) China: Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MoHURD)	
	Dialogue on Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (n/a)	EU: DG ENV (European Commission) China: State Forestry Administration (SFA)	
	Climate Change Partnership (Annual (at least))	EU: DG CLIMA (European Commission) China: National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)	Established in 2005. It is implemented mainly through a Bilateral Consultation Mechanism (BCM), as well as through direct cooperation between each side at the multilateral level.
	Dialogue on Agriculture (Annual)	EU: DG AGRI (European Commission) China: Ministry of Agriculture	Established in 2005.
	Science and Technology Steering Committee (Annual)	EU: DG RTD (European Commission) China: Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST)	Established in 1998.

	Steering Committee on Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy (PUNE) (Annual)	EU: DG RTD (European Commission); Joint Research Centre (European Commission) China: Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST); China Atomic Energy Authority; National Nuclear Safety Administration	Established in 2011. It is composed of sub-committees on: fission; fusion; security; safeguards and safety.
	Dialogue on Space Technology (n/a)	EU: DG ENTR (European Commission); European Space Agency (ESA) China: Ministry of Science and Technology	This dialogue includes cooperation on satellite navigation.
	Dialogue on Information and Communication Technologies Research (n/a)	EU: DG CONNECT (European Commission) China: Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST)	Established in 1997. The dialogue is being backed up with a considerable number of technical assistance activities.
	Dialogue on IT, Telecommunications, and Informatisation (n/a)	EU: DG CONNECT (European Commission) China: Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT)	Established in 2009.
	Policy Dialogue on Education and Vocational Training Affairs (Annual (flexible))	EU: DG EAC (European Commission) China: Ministry of Education	Established in 2007. It includes a dialogue on multilingualism (established in 2009).
	Policy Dialogue on Cultural Affairs (Annual (flexible))	EU: DG EAC (European Commission) China: Ministry of Culture	Established in 2007.

	Policy Dialogue on Youth Affairs (Annual (flexible))	EU: DG EAC (European Commission) China: All-China Youth Federation	Established in 2011.
	High Level Cultural Forum (Annual)	EU: DG EAC (European Commission); International Transcultural Institute China: Ministry of Culture; Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)	Established in 2009. The EU-China High Level Cultural Forum is an unprecedented platform for comprehensive communication.
	ADS Committee (Ad hoc)	EU: EEAS China: National Tourism Administration	Established in 2004 by the EU-China Tourism Agreement. The EU delegation negotiates on behalf of the EU.
Other platforms	Inter-Parliamentary Meetings (Twice a year)	EU: European Parliament China: National People's Congress	Established in 1980.
	High Level Political Parties and Groups Forum (Annual)	EU: European Parliament's Political Groups China: Representatives from the National People's Congress and from the Communist Party	Established in 2010.
	Roundtable Meetings (Twice a year)	EU: European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) China: China Economic and Social Council (CESC)	Established in 2006. Two main types of topic have appeared on the agenda of this civil society forum

Appendix iii – Extended examples of the organisational discourses

Table 6.2 Extended examples of discourse 1 from Pillar 2 and 3 dialogues

Commission Directorate (General)/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	<p>1. “The promotion of our values, apart from what the Lisbon Treaty says, of course, it’s also part of our global strategy, our EU-China strategy, whatever you take, it is there. But at least ... [from] what I have seen in here [at the EU delegation to China], and I am not now talking for [name of human rights desk] and you know, and [his/her] human rights background or for our core [the political section] specifically, you know there to discuss those issues you know, straightforward. It’s mostly in the background. I mean on my side.</p> <p>I will give you a very good example ...from Home Affairs ...This thing ...between Europol and MPS [Ministry of Public Security] ...which was signed here last month. I mean, it is clear to everyone that it [values] does transpire in the discussions, that for example, we cannot do certain things with China, because well either we think that they may apply the death penalty or we think that their data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewee explicitly suggests that they are not conducting systematic value mainstreaming in their dialogues. • Displaying discourse 1, they justify this on the basis that such activities are unnecessary, as EU values implicitly feature in their exchanges with China. They cast as being pre-built into the EU documents that guide them (i.e. “apart from what the Lisbon Treaty says, of course, it’s also part of our global strategy ...whatever you take, it is there ...It’s mostly in the background. I mean on my side”). • The interviewee reaffirms this justification for not systematically mainstreaming EU values, through the example of the Europol-MPS international law enforcement cooperation dialogues. • They suggest that EU values are sufficiently featuring in these dialogues and no formal actions are required, as them and their colleagues will naturally promote/enforce EU’s values (i.e. “it is clear to everyone that it [values] does transpire in the discussions ...

	<p>protection is not up to our standards. So I mean, it is not something you know, that is you know is point black and white on the Agenda of the meeting, so now we will tell you that your standards are not up to our standards but the moment you start talking in practice about certain, about certain, instruments, or cooperation or whatever I see those limits are ...the red lines are rather [than being] correctly stated somewhere, they are more in the background than that, but they are [there]”.³⁷⁷</p>	<p>the red-lines are rather [than being] correctly stated somewhere, they are more in the background”).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It could also be argued that the quote displays <i>partial mainstreaming</i> (See Chapter 9.2), as they infer that human rights related-issues are being raised in the Europol-MPS dialogues (e.g. the death penalty), though the officials involved are not explicitly designing the value into the dialogue. • The interviewee’s language also alludes to the prevalence of a lack of value mainstreaming at the delegation more broadly (i.e. “[from] what I have seen in here ...it’s mostly in the background”). • Notably, their language ascribes this deficit to not only discourse 1, but discourse 2, as they suggest that value mainstreaming is only relevant to the work of the EEAS (who are “there to discuss those issues you know, straightforward [i.e. directly]”).
Science, Technology and Environment Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	<p>2. Interviewer: Are you thinking about these things [values], how you can integrate [for example] the rule of law element? Are these conversations taking place?</p> <p>Interviewee: They [the values] are there already, based on the structure of what we do.³⁷⁸</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays discourse 1 in the suggestion that value mainstreaming activities (systematic or otherwise) are not necessary, since EU values are already passively promoted through their dialogues.

³⁷⁷ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 22.05.2017 at 12.30pm, in Beijing.

³⁷⁸ Interview with an official from the European Commission on 23.05.2017 at 3.00pm, in Beijing.

<p>DG Education and Culture (EAC) [BRU]</p>	<p>3. “It’s by actually facilitating the meeting and the joint working and creation of Europeans and Chinese people ...[that] we can best in way advocate our values and defend them. Because obviously, I mean, any cultural cooperation needs ...freedom of expression ...So we really in a way, best communicate our values and show them how they enfold in the joint work and hopefully it will have a positive spill-over”. ³⁷⁹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewee suggests that the implicit demonstration of EU values through “joint work” (i.e. via cooperation projects) reflects the “best” means to promote EU values. • Importantly, they suggest that through “facilitating” these non-official contacts, where EU values will be implicitly shared, they are sufficiently realising EU values in cultural dialogues and no further action is required. • This reflects an invocation of discourse 1 as justification for not systematically mainstreaming EU values.
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³⁷⁹ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 17.06.2015 at 5.00pm, in Brussels.

Table 6.4 Extended examples of discourse 2 from Pillar 2 and 3 dialogues

EEAS Directorate/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
DG Climate Action (CLIMA) [BRU]	1. The official described how EU values were “much more discussed” in the dialogues managed by their colleagues in the EEAS and DG Justice and Consumers (JUST), before adding that “obviously we are not doing that”. ³⁸⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displaying discourse 2, the interviewee overtly suggests that EU values are the isolated responsibility of their colleagues in the EEAS and DG JUST and not relevant to their dialogue. • The strength of the discourse is reflected in the suggestion that such a division of labour is natural and implicit (“obviously we are not doing that”). • Interestingly, the EU-China Legal Affairs Dialogue is cast as an inherently normative dialogue, wherein value mainstreaming is outsourced in EU-China relations, despite DG JUST accounts also displaying the discourse and themselves outsourcing value mainstreaming to the EEAS.

³⁸⁰ Interview with an official from DG CLIMA on 16.02.2017 at 9.30am, in Brussels.

DG Education and Culture (EAC) [BRU]	2. I think the dialogue on human rights is fully justified and it has its own impact, as limited as it is... but it's important I think to have a standalone dialogue on human rights. Of course we could consider that culture, cultural cooperation and people-to-people contacts are a way to share our values but we should be very careful there, because if we use culture for human rights purposes I think it can be counter-productive, I mean it will actually in a way weaken our cultural cooperation and weaken our effect on human rights". ³⁸¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infers that human rights promotion should be restricted to an isolated (i.e. "standalone") channel where responsibility is delegated for promoting the value. • Invoking discourse 2, they suggest that they are not mainstreaming human rights into cultural dialogues with China on the basis that it is inapplicable, • The strength of discourse 2 is displayed in them casting the compartmentalisation of human rights to the dedicated dialogue as "important". • They also justify their avoidance of human rights mainstreaming on the basis that it will undermine cultural dialogues. This displays discourse 3 ("I think it can be counter-productive ...in a way weaken our cultural cooperation"). • The example also captures how the human rights dialogue is invoked as a cautionary tale for human rights promotion with China, deterring such activities as conflictual and low ("limited") impact in practice.
Local staff, EU Delegation to China [BEI]	3. The interviewee described how human rights and rule of law were "more political and dealt with by the political section". ³⁸²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that controversial EU values in the bilateral relationship are exclusively "dealt with" by the EEAS (which populates "the political section" at the delegation) and by-proxy, not the responsibility of officials operationalising EU-China People-to-People dialogues. • The language can also be seen to reflect discourse 3, as value mainstreaming is cast as an activity likely to antagonise the Chinese side and threaten the outcomes of dialogues (i.e. values are cast as "political" issues).

³⁸¹ Interview with an official from DG EAC on 17.06.2015 at 5.00pm, in Brussels.

³⁸² Interview with an official from the European Commission on 26.05.2017 at 10.00am, in Beijing.

<p>DG Foreign Affairs [Council of the European Union]</p>	<p>4. “You find, at least with the people, that come to the Council, a certain reluctance to engage with the Chinese, uhm, raising issues, there are not necessarily part of their portfolio and they consider this to be something for the EEAS”.³⁸³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example displays a Council official reaffirming the prevalence of discourse 2 amongst their Commission colleagues. • Their language implies that Commission officials are communicating to the Council formations relevant to EU-China relations - e.g. the Asia-Oceania Working Party (COASI) - that EU values mainstreaming is not relevant to their dialogues with China (“not necessarily part of their portfolio”). • Instead they consider such activities to be exclusive responsibility of the EEAS.
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³⁸³ Interview with an official from DG Foreign Affairs (Council of the European Union) 03.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

Table 6.5 Extended examples of discourse 2 from EEAS diplomats

EEAS Directorate/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	<p>1. “We’ve got a competition dialogue being set up ...it’s about again, level playing field in... market economy principles, so... again, we’re not going to have a specific human rights article in there but there’s other values, that are included in there, are embedded somehow”.³⁸⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays both organisational discourses. • Interviewee invokes discourse 2 through suggesting that human rights will not be systematically mainstreamed into the agenda of the new EU-China competition dialogue on the basis that it is not applicable to it (“we’re not going to have a specific human rights article in there”). • Interviewee displays discourse 1 in suggesting that “other (undefined) values” will be implicit to the dialogue (“embedded somehow”), so no further actions are necessary to realise them. • Example supports the argument that EEAS diplomats are sharing these discourses and de-facto enabling or actively reproducing them amongst their Commission colleagues.

³⁸⁴ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 05.10.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

<p>Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]</p>	<p>2. “I think if you are in trade, you are in trade, you are not necessarily thinking about human rights, that’s the political section. [Spoken from the perspective of trade officials:] <i>I don’t deal with that, that’s for them to do</i>”.</p> <p>3. Building on the quote above, when asked about whether the value mainstreaming prescribed by the Lisbon Treaty’s article 21 translated to practice in EU-China trade dialogues, the interviewee stated:</p> <p>“I’d say not, because think about the human [rights] factor, if you are a busy trade official in the EU delegation, you have got to understand very fully the EU side and what’s all its positions and what they mean, its aims and aspirations etc, you have to understand the Chinese side which is very archaic at times ...do you really feel confident enough that you know enough about the EU’s position on human rights etc, etc, to want to introduce this?”³⁸⁵</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewee invokes discourse 2 in suggesting that human rights has little relevance for officials involved with EU-China trade dialogues, instead being the exclusive responsibility of the EEAS, via the delegation’s political section (“I think if you are in trade, you are in trade ...human rights, that’s the political section”). • They allude to the prevalence of discourse 2 amongst their Commission colleagues, through paraphrasing them invoking it (“I don’t deal with that, that’s for them to do”). • Suggests that human rights mainstreaming is rarely taking place in EU-China trade dialogues. • The second adjacent quote displays the interviewee suggesting that DG Trade officials a) do not have the knowledge/expertise and b) are too “busy” to promote human rights. • In this sense, they are again invoking discourse 2 to legitimise their DG Trade colleagues not mainstreaming human rights. • Both quotes support the argument that EEAS diplomats are sharing discourse 2 and enabling or actively reproducing it as a result.
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³⁸⁵ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2018 at 2.15pm in Bath.

<p>DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) [BRU]</p>	<p>4. “I think they try to understand what is important to each of us and try to develop, you know, our priorities ...and then for things like human rights etc, it’s not something they are going to consult too much on with us they are going to just develop it on their own because they, they are the most suitable”.³⁸⁶</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infers that EEAS diplomats are not promoting value mainstreaming amongst their Commission colleagues, instead letting the DGs determine their own sector-specific “priorities”. • Suggests that the EEAS is communicating to the DGs that human rights is not applicable to their dialogues nor their responsibility (“it’s not something they are going to consult too much on ...because they, they are the most suitable”). • Example thus again alludes to the EEAS enabling or actively reproducing these perceptions informed by discourse 2.
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³⁸⁶ Interview with an official from DG GROW on 09.03.2017 at 3.30pm, in Brussels.

Appendix iv – Extended examples of the discourses surrounding China’s role

Table 7.1 Extended examples of discourse 3 in Pillar 2 and 3 dialogues

Institution – European Commission European/ External Action Service (EEAS)	Directorate (General)/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
EEAS	Political, Press and Information Section, EU delegation to China [BEI]	1. The interviewee described how they were seeking a “meeting point” between the EU and China in the context of judicial cooperation and that China “will do nothing if it is not [in] their interest.” ³⁸⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that the interviewee is avoiding mainstreaming values through the EU-China Legal Affairs Dialogue due a perception that such activities are pointless, with China expected to refuse to engage with them. • This reflects an invocation of discourse 3. • Interviewee also infers that these concerns over triggering obstructive behaviour by China are informing them <i>restricting</i> the agenda of the LAD to more technical issues, which reflect a “meeting point” between the EU and China. • Example highlights how discourse 3 supports Chinese as opposed to EU interests in ensuring that controversial values are not being tabled in dialogues. • Example displays how EEAS diplomats are sharing and potentially enabling or actively reproducing the discourse among their Commission colleagues.

³⁸⁷ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 08.06.2017 4.00pm, in Beijing.

European Commission	DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL) [BRU]	<p>2. The official described their dialogues as having a “positive agenda with China”, particularly with regard to labour market reform, which the Chinese leadership has put “high on its agenda”.</p> <p>Conversely, they noted that “there is this idealistic” (value) dimension which contrasts with the “realistic” substance they outlined, which reflects the “the negative agenda” with China. They added that “If I was to mainstream human rights, it would spoil the positive agenda”.³⁸⁸</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invoking discourse 3, the interviewee suggests that they are not mainstreaming controversial EU values into their dialogues out of fear that it will create tensions with their counterparts. • This is explicitly reflected in their characterisation of value-related substance as the “negative agenda”, versus the more productive and successful pursuit of comparably non-controversial, sector-specific substance like “labour market reform”. They cast this as the “positive agenda with China”. • Reaffirming this analysis, they explicitly describe how “If I was to mainstream human rights, it would spoil the positive agenda”. • Example also reinforces how discourse 3 is supporting China’s interest in avoiding discussion of values in EU-China dialogues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They suggest that the bilaterally agreed dialogue theme of “labour market reforms”, a relatively technical area, is a Chinese priority (“high on its agenda”). ▪ This infers that the EU is happy to acquiesce to the Chinese side’s choice of theme, which steers clear of the more controversial human rights dimensions of the sector. • While labour market reforms have connections to human rights, the interviewee explicitly makes the distinction between human rights and this theme. • This not only reaffirms that systematic human rights mainstreaming is not taking place but alludes to potential <i>partial mainstreaming</i> (See chapter 9.2) in these dialogues: human rights dimensions may be being raised through this theme without officials instrumentally designing it into the agenda nor necessarily being aware of it.
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³⁸⁸ Interview with an official from DG EMPL on 03.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

Table 7.2 Extended examples of discourse 3, relating to the human rights dialogue

EEAS Directorate/ Department and location (Brussels [BRU]/Beijing [BEI])	Quoted example	Analysis
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	1. You cannot go to China and try China... to try to make China adopt or act on something they have not signed up to, that's an illusion right. So we're not... that's not our agenda. ³⁸⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In line with discourse 3, the language here strongly emphasises how obstructive China is in the EU-China human rights dialogue. • Interviewee suggests that promoting any aspects of human rights which do not correspond with international documents that China has signed up to is a wasted pursuit and those that think otherwise are not engaging with reality (i.e. "an illusion"). • Quote can also be seen to hint at didactic approaches by EEAS diplomats to promote human rights, based on a perception that China <i>should be</i> complying with the EU interpretation. • This is reflected in the notion of the EU trying to "make China adopt or act" on the EU interpretation of international documents • This reflects an example of discourse 5.

³⁸⁹ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels

ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	2. “In 2013, the Chinese started asking questions about the human rights situation within the European Union ...they were focusing mostly also on cases involving Chinese nationals, so it would be, I don’t know if you remember, there was a case of Chinese students who were attacked in the South of France, so they raised that ...as an illustration of xenophobia ...There was [also] a case of an old Chinese couple who couldn’t obtain, gain a German citizenship because their command of the German language was not good enough”. ³⁹⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays how China seeks to obstruct EU human rights promotion by highlighting human rights infringements within the EU, seeking to illuminate the EU’s hypocrisies. • The obstructive nature of this conduct and lack of genuine concern for human rights infringements (according to the Western interpretation of the values) is also reflected in the suggestion that China is failing to distinguish between actions by citizens and those by the state. • The interviewee’s language confirms that the EU views this behaviour by the Chinese side as purely obstructive as opposed to benevolent attempt for the Chinese side express their human rights concerns in the EU and uphold international standards. • Such behaviour by the Chinese side is cast as a primary impediment to EU human rights promotion and thus reflects an invocation of discourse 3.
ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]	3. “It’s supposed to be bi-annual, but for the past four years, basically we haven’t been able to have two rounds, because de-facto the Chinese have decided that one a year is enough”. ³⁹¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays how China reduced the quantity of EU-China human rights dialogues on a unilateral basis, to reduce its efficacy (“de-facto the Chinese have decided that one a year is enough”). • This reflects an invocation of discourse 3 in its attribution of blame to the Chinese side for impeding the EU’s efforts to conduct the human rights dialogue.

³⁹⁰ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 09.04.2015 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

³⁹¹ *ibid.*

<p>ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]</p>	<p>4. “There used to be a human rights seminar, that lasted for about three years, but that was not even very satisfactory, the idea was to bring civil society and academics together, but it was clear that... I mean, I have only attended one and that was in 2012. In 2013 we just could not get it organized, so basically the money was lost as well... but it was very tense, it was extremely tense.”³⁹²</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewee describes how China instrumentally ensured that accompanying human rights seminars unproductive and this underpinned them being ceased altogether. • Their language provides greater insight into these dynamics with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The suggestion of open conflict during seminars (“it was very tense, it was extremely tense”) ▪ The seminar system ending after China simply refused to take part (“In 2013 we just could not get it organized, so basically the money was lost”). • The language also alludes to broader poor state of the human rights dialogue itself, which is attributed to China’s conduct (“there used to be a human rights seminar, that lasted for about three years, but <i>that was not even very satisfactory</i> [emphasis added]”). • The suggestion is that no aspect of the dialogue is satisfactory for the EU side due to China’s conduct.
<p>ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]</p>	<p>5. “Although the dialogue is still taking place, its less frequent it’s very difficult to get dates and agree on the agenda, well in advance of the dialogue because we keep saying this a way for us to ensure good preparation, the presence of experts but normally you are told like maybe six weeks before <i>those are the dates</i> and then we agree on the agenda.”³⁹³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests that the EU is having profound difficulties in organising dialogues due to the conduct of the Chinese side. • This includes the refusal of their counterparts to provide dates and approve the agenda (“it’s very difficult to get dates and agree on the agenda, well in advance of the dialogue”) • Similarly, the interviewee suggests that the EU side has been repeatedly contacting their counterparts to prepare the dialogue, but this has been unsuccessful with the Chinese side intentionally providing dates and agreeing on the agenda at very short notice to undermine the exchange (“we keep saying this a way for us to ensure good preparation, the presence of experts but normally you are told like maybe six weeks before those are the dates and then we agree on the agenda”).

³⁹² *ibid.*

³⁹³ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 23.03.2017 at 11.00am, in Brussels.

<p>ASIAPAC: Asia and Pacific Directorate [BRU]</p>	<p>6. It's not a secret at all ...with Greece, but in terms of the others, it can be Hungary, it can [be]... there is now a bad tendency to come back to national interest, in the bilateral investment from China to the country, an element that is [having] increasingly [more] weight [than] the human rights considerations.³⁹⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays how EU unity on human rights is being threatened by Chinese investment to individual member states. • Suggestion that this pursuit of national interest at the expense of EU unity reflects a common or even regular occurrence ("there is now a bad tendency to come back to national interest ... bilateral investment from China is [having] increasingly [more] weight [than] the human right considerations").
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³⁹⁴ Interview with a diplomat from the EEAS on 10.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

Appendix v – Partial mainstreaming in EU-China employment and social affairs dialogues: Participant observation

It is worth briefly summarising some of the partial mainstreaming dynamics that the author observed in practice, during their presence at an EU-China dialogue connected to social policy in 2017. The dialogue included themes such as adaption to macro-economic developments, the so-called new economy (e.g. platforms like Uber and Deliveroo) and the promotion of entrepreneurship. On numerous occasions the EU side indirectly raised issues connected to human rights.

An interview with one of the Commission diplomats responsible for planning and designing the dialogue, revealed that human rights was not explicitly, nor systematically mainstreamed into the dialogue.³⁹⁵ In this sense, on numerous occasions references were made by the speakers on the EU side to the importance of policy making which promoted the inclusion of underrepresented minorities, particularly women, migrants and lower income families.³⁹⁶ These references were typically connected to explanations of the EU's policies in this sector, which are based upon EU values.³⁹⁷ As a result, officials were partial mainstreaming these dimensions, having not explicitly designed them into the exchange. Perhaps the most interesting example saw the European Pillar of Social Rights being briefly explained, but it appeared to only have been raised because it reflected part of a guiding sectoral policy document connected to the themes and not because the speaker was seeking to raise human rights with the Chinese side.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Interview with an official from DG EMPL on 03.10.2017 at 10.00am, in Brussels.

³⁹⁶ European Commission officials speaking at an EU-China dialogue connected to social policy and employment on 09.10.2017, in Brussels.

³⁹⁷ *ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *ibid.*